AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTICAL LIFE

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BY THE

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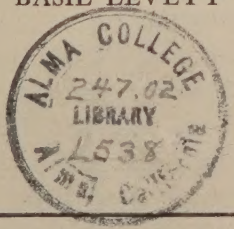

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PREFACE

In order to avoid a misunderstanding to which the very title of this work might lead, it cannot be too forcibly stated that the Mystical Life is not with any infallible certainty the outcome of our own personal effort, however rightly that effort may have been made. Let us suppose that a soul has realized all the proper conditions of recollection and generosity which we are about to describe, is it certain that the Mystical Life will result from such effort, as effect from cause? Certainly not; we shall presently hear the greatest mystical writers themselves declare that this life is the gift of God—a gift which He makes to whom He pleases, and when He pleases; we shall hear them affirm that it is absurd to suppose that we can ever hope to win this grace for ourselves by our personal industry. What, then, is man's part in this matter? It consists only in cultivating the ground for grace, in working the soil so as to render it fit to receive the heavenly showers; but this labour

will with no more certainty ensure the growth of the Mystical Life in the soul, than will that of a gardener who digs ensure the needful rain for his garden. Alvarez de Paz, for example, devotes many a page, as do several other mystical writers, to *Preparation for Contemplation*. He tells us that God does not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity, and that very often the gift of the Mystical Life follows on man's good will ; but he hastens, at the same time, to assure us that there is no necessary connection between man's effort and this precious gift ; and that if the Mystical Life usually does appear on a soil thus prepared, it cannot be said to germinate always by reason of a law in itself infallible and binding upon God. There is, indeed, no connection between man's effort and a resulting grace of this nature ; and what is more, there exists no promise on God's part to give the Mystical Life as a reward of this effort.

We beg our readers to pay attention to this important declaration. It will prevent any misunderstanding of our teaching in the following pages. We feel sure that, after this warning, no one can accuse us of nourishing in certain souls the dangerous illusion that the Mystical Life will infallibly result for them from the con-

ditions we are about to study. Once again, it is not the means for attaining to the Mystical Life which we pretend to reveal; this would be pure presumption. We only hope to point out to souls of good will some of the practices which spiritual writers teach as forming the best dispositions for that life; and we can only repeat that, although these dispositions may have been realized in their fulness, and to perfection, God ever remains free to grant this Life at any time He pleases, or to withhold it for ever.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MYSTICAL LIFE

CHAPTER I

THE END WE HAVE IN VIEW: THE MYSTICAL LIFE

1. If the number of those who are happy enough to attain to the Mystical Life is not greater, is it not because many excellent souls are even to-day haunted by prejudice? Is it not because the expression "mystical life" too often sounds alarming in our ears, and suggests ideas of a perfection well nigh impossible of realization? To dissipate all these spectres of a fear both uncertain and without foundation; to convince generous souls that, in aspiring to this life, they are neither rash nor presumptuous—on the contrary, that they are rather exercising a right, and at times fulfilling a duty; to discountenance exaggerations, and draw up a scheme which, while maintaining a certain elevation, holds out

nothing which is alarming or impossible of attainment; such is our ambition, such is the aim which, in the following pages, we desire to keep resolutely before us.

We feel bound at the very outset to formulate for those whom we are leading towards the Mystical Life a precise definition thereof. They are within their rights in not wishing to advance along the path with eyes shut—in inquiring whither we are leading. As soon, then, as the stupendous reality which lies hid in the words "mystical life" begins to dawn on them, the hesitating step will, we doubt not, become quicker and more assured.

Besides, when a soul has only uncertain and confused notions concerning the Mystical Life, the request which it makes to God for that Life lacks some of the precision which is desirable, the result being but a vaguely outlined aspiration instead of a clearly defined prayer. Nothing short of an exact notion of what the Mystical Life really is can give shape to these aspirations, and remove from them that nebulous form which there will otherwise be always a risk of their retaining when directed to God in prayer. It is, then, time well spent if we can thereby point out to the pilgrim the goal to which he is pressing, help him to understand

the specific character of the Mystical Life, and the particular note which distinguishes that state from the other inferior states of the spiritual life.

What is, then, the essential element of the Mystical Life? Let the reader carefully weigh our reply: it is the sensation which the soul feels of God's presence within it, an experience of God present in the soul, a sort of feeling of God in the soul's centre. As Gerson teaches, "it is an *experimental* knowledge of God born of unitive love"—an experience of God, a perception of God—such is the essential element of the Mystical Life.

We easily see already how incomplete is that definition of the Mystical Life to be found in many modern writers—"an intimate union with God by love." But sanctifying grace is also a union with God, a union intimate by reason of love. Is the mystical state, then, similar to the simple state of sanctifying grace? If, between these two states, there lies an essential difference, is it right to confound them by a similar definition? Since, however, it is universally admitted that the Mystical Life is essentially distinct from the ordinary life of grace; since it is equally admitted that the simple state of grace does not imply the possession of the

Mystical Life, the special note constituting this Life must be found—the special note which will enable us to assign to it a place apart from, and superior to, the ordinary states of grace.

We must not imagine that this note is to be sought for in the closeness of union which the Mystical Life creates between God and the soul. If the closeness of union sufficed to create the Mystical Life, it would follow that this Life does not differ essentially from the ordinary life of grace—that is, the life of grace, as it were, augmented—raised to a higher degree. If we would have a clear notion of what the Mystical Life, as distinguished from ordinary states, really is, we must put aside all incomplete definitions ; we must remember that it is, in plain language, an experience—a perception of God present within us.

Let us keep the word "union" in our definition, if we will ; we do not object to it. We would merely warn our readers that the word by itself is not a sufficient expression unless completed by the further explanation that, for the union to be mystical. it must be felt, perceived, by the aid of a spiritual sense awakened by God in the soul.

A few extracts from the writings of mystical authors will help to explain what we mean.

Let us commence with one which is at once brief and precise: "In this life we cannot enjoy the vision of God, but we may touch Him, feel Him, and rejoice in Him through love."[1]

"God," says Courbon, "God Who is, as we know, everywhere, and Who interpenetrates all things, gives to that soul the power to feel His presence with a certain fulness; He bestows on it a certain unction which takes hold of and penetrates it—a certain delicacy of touch *which leaves it no longer in doubt that it is God Who makes Himself felt.*"[2]

Again, to quote Père Lallemand: "In meditation our vision is hazy—we see things from afar, and with more dryness. In contemplation we see more distinctly—things appear close to us; we can *touch, feel, taste, and experience*, in the inner man. To meditate on Hell is to see a lion in a picture; in contemplation we see a live lion."[3]

We must, however, beware of confusing this mystical sense of the presence of God in the soul with the sentiment which is sometimes produced by the ordinary spirit of devotion. A recollected soul can represent God as present within it by

[1] Père Surin, *Fond. de la Vie spirit.*, part i., ch. iii.
[2] *Instr. sur l'Oraison*, part iv., First Instruction.
[3] 7e *Principe*, art. iv., § 1.

the aid of imagination ; nothing more right and proper than this, and nothing more encourages both recollection and the outpourings of love. But this idea of God, of which we are ourselves the author, in nowise resembles the reality which, in our innermost selves, mystical contemplation enables us both to feel and touch. It is God Himself in us, and no more His image, which, in this contemplation, we perceive and touch. And from this perception of God, as well as from the contact with Him, is born within us a sense which cannot be brought down to the level of any human sense, and which, once tasted, it is impossible to confound with any of the joys of ordinary devotion. "Contemplation," says again Père Lallemand, "reveals to the soul a new world of ravishing beauty. St. Teresa, rising from her prayer, speaks of herself as coming from a world without comparison grander and more lovely than a thousand worlds like this."[1]

"The soul," says the same author, "clearly perceives that she is on a new road, surrounded with things hitherto unknown to her. When, after long perseverance in purifying the heart, God comes to enter into her, and to *show Himself to her openly* by the gift of His holy presence,

[1] 7e *Principe*, art. iii., § 1.

the soul finds herself so delighted with her new state, it seems to her that hitherto she has neither known nor loved God."[1]

A few years ago a learned religious of the Society of Jesus—Père Poulain—published a work on the mystical teaching of St. John of the Cross,[2] which appears to us to be the last word in criticism regarding the work of this saint, and which we should like to see in the hands of those who really desire to understand the great Spanish mystic. In this work, Père Poulain insists particularly on the character of the mystical contemplation which we have been enunciating. "The two essential points of difference which separate the mystical state from ordinary prayer are," he says, "experimental knowledge and passivity." If, during ordinary prayer, it can be said that sometimes the presence of God is felt, it is indirectly, as, when human love is very strong, we say that it makes the loved one seem near. The mystical state, on the contrary, comprises a genuine possession, *felt, intimate*, although more or less veiled. This is, indeed, a commonplace to those who have had the experience, and can be proved by a multitude of mystical writings. Well does

[1] 7ª *Principe*, art. ii., § 1.
[2] *The Graces of Interior Prayer*. Kegan Paul, London.

the Venerable John of St. Samson—a Carmelite —write in his Maxims : " The essence of mystical theology is nothing short of an ineffable *perception* of God." It is not a learned *conception* of God. Neither genius nor learning can help at all—a lay sister can succeed as easily as a senior wrangler.

" Writers at second-hand," adds Père Poulain, " have not always expressed this truth with sufficient clearness in their descriptions. They pause to consider circumstances of secondary import which do not contribute to conciseness. They say, for example, that this contemplation differs from ordinary contemplation by reason of its being more profound, more sublime, more sweet, etc. But these are differences of *quantity*, not of quality and of kind."[1]

The same author, in an article recently published under the title of *Les Desiderata de la Mystique*,[2] returns once more to this question of prime import : " The basis of mystical prayer, at once invariable and characteristic, is this : God begins to make *His presence felt* in a real though veiled and mysterious manner. As Scaramelli well expresses it, we feel a ' spiritual sensation ' manifesting its presence."

[1] *Mystique de Saint-Jean de la Croix*, p. 18, note 1.
[2] Printed as a pamphlet by Retaux.

"But what," continues Père Poulain, "is the character of that impression? It is not necessary to examine it here. Suffice it to say that it does not mean that we see God; it denotes more a sense of internal touch which only those can realize who have had the experience. The best comparison is to be found in the sensation which we have of the presence of our body when, while keeping still, we shut our eyes. We do not see it; nevertheless, we perceive that it is there, and that we both interpenetrate it and are co-extensive therewith."

"But the question with which we are here concerned is not so much to describe in detail the manner of this communication as to keep firmly in view the fact that we actually *feel the presence of God;* this is the point from which we set out. In ordinary prayer, on the contrary, things are much simpler, and the supernatural is less in evidence; we are content to *think* about God's presence as one *thinks* about any other fact—it is not felt experimentally. Here is a line of demarcation between the ordinary way and the mystical way as clearly cut as possible. Here, then, as far as I see, is the first law of mystical prayer, without which the key is wanting."[1]

[1] *Études des P.P. Jésuites*, March 20, 1898.

I have reserved as the last and decisive argument St. Teresa's witness. She is recounting how, before she was definitely converted, God at times raised her to the mystical state for a very short space of time. "Sometimes," she writes, "while reading, I became suddenly *seized with a sense of the presence of God. It then became absolutely impossible for me to doubt that He was in me.*"[1]

In another chapter she expresses the same truth in a manner not less lucid: "After I had a little commenced supernatural prayer—*i.e.*, the prayer of quiet—I seemed *to feel the presence of God, which was true*, and I tried to maintain a recollected spirit in Him."[2]

2. We have arrived at a point where we must ask the question as to whether we have the right to desire the Mystical Life and to pray for it. Even to-day there are many souls full of prejudices, both numerous and tenacious, regarding the lawfulness of this desire. One can never, anyhow, accuse mystical writers with having given birth to such prejudices. Mystical writers have not all broached the subject; many, indeed, seem to have wished to avoid the difficulty, and so to have given way to the prejudices of those around them. But those who have not recoiled before

[1] *Life of St. Teresa*, ch. x. [2] *Ibid.*, ch. xxii.

the problem have all admitted the lawfulness. They have all proclaimed that it was perfectly lawful to desire the good things of the mystical order, and that the request made to God, far from being displeasing, could not be other than welcome to Him.

Let us hear first of all the witness of one of the most eminent of our mystical writers, viz., Alvarez de Paz: "We must be careful," he writes, "to distinguish between contemplation or the Mystical Life, and the special gifts which may accompany it, such as ecstasies,[1] ravishments, and visions, either bodily or imaginary. It is forbidden to desire these gifts, and to ask for them, but to strive to reach them would be madness. Anyone receiving such gifts should, with all humility, decline so dangerous an honour, and ask God rather to allow him to walk in the royal road of suffering.

"As regards the Mystical Life itself, is it permissible to desire it ardently, and to ask for it with humility? Why not? For is it not the most efficacious means for attaining to per-

[1] It is clear that this author is here speaking of ecstasies only which are of a nature to draw public attention, otherwise there would be a contradiction in what follows. In so far as they are an intense mystic union, they may be desired; but it is clear that there is no sort of reason to desire for oneself the physical condition which accompanies that union—certainly not its outward manifestation.

fection? And if it is right to desire the end, can it be forbidden to desire the means leading to that end? It is most helpful, assuredly, to covet great holiness, and not to entrench oneself behind the desire for an ordinary Christian life. It is not less helpful to pray ardently for that holiness for the glory of God, in order the more greatly to please Him, the better to glorify Him, and to show Him more gratitude. The desire and request for the means which will lead the soul to this holiness are, then, most lawful. Now, one of these means is mystical contemplation, which in a short time enables souls to make immense progress, and increases in an extraordinary degree their love and purity. If, then, O man of God, thou hast prepared thyself in so far as thy frail humanity permits thee, if the arrow of Divine love has wounded thee, pour forth thy tears both day and night to obtain this grace, and give thyself no repose till God hath granted it to thee. It is a gift; if thou wish for it, thou must both desire it and ask for it. To the lowly it has been given to become great; however lowly thou art, ask this great thing. To aspire to great positions of state, to solicit worldly honours, is the result of pride. To aspire to a better place in God's house, to a more perfect saintliness, betokens

greatness of soul. It is God's will that thou shouldest know God Himself and His Son Jesus Christ, Whom He has sent here below; it is God's will that thou shouldest love Him with all thy heart and with all Thy soul. Thou canst, therefore, ask for the realization of all this in thyself; for what is thy petition but the desire and request for contemplation? Come boldly to God, then, and say: 'If I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now (by the aid of mystical contemplation) Thy face.'[1] If God grant thee this favour, thou shalt receive it with humility; if He refuse it, be not cast down, complain not at thy lot, for it would be the height of pride; but seek only to attain a more perfect love, and be content, in the meanwhile, with thy lower place."[2]

Mystical graces are the surest means for reaching holiness—for realizing, in its entirety, the scheme of Christian perfection, and for this cause they form a legitimate object of prayer. Such is the argument of Alvarez de Paz, and such also is the manner in which all mystical writers treat the subject. "Without mystical contemplation," says Père Lallemand, "no great advance can be made in virtue, nor can one be

[1] Exod. xxxiii. 13.
[2] *De Nat. Contempl.*, cap. xiii.

ever really in a fit state to help others to advance. Shortcomings and imperfections will never really be left behind ; the soul will remain bound down to earth, and never will it be able to raise itself above the things of Nature. Never, in fact, will it be able to render to God a perfect service."[1]

A mystical writer, much to be recommended —Père Surin—urges souls many hundred times in his works towards the possession of mystical joys and good things as a stimulus to their good-will, and to this end he exhorts them to direct their prayers and all their aspirations. "We say, then, that God *ordinarily and infallibly* gives such a complete satisfaction of heart by union in love to those who obey His word literally—*i.e.*, His laws and His directions—that they are able to say that they enjoy perfect happiness. If they obey Jesus Christ in all things, if they put off all love of earthly things, they will become possessed, *as far as hope will reach*, of such a love towards God, and of such a union with Him, that all the joys of kings are nothing in comparison with that which will be theirs."[2]

The same author, in his *Traité de l'amour de*

[1] 7e *Principe*, ch. iv., art. iv.
[2] *Fond. de la Vie Spirit.*, book v., ch. xiv.

Dieu, goes even further; he declares that no one having once had knowledge of the Mystical Life ever failed to attain to it unless he has been unfaithful to grace: "All who are faithful to the motions of ordinary grace may hope for the good things of the Mystical Life; they are the fruits and rewards of a Christian life. To each individual is this promise held out; if anyone fail, it is through his own fault, for God has given him all things necessary, both in the Church and in the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ, which He shed in order to win these treasures for man."[1]

Some have quoted St. John of the Cross in opposition to this teaching, seeing that his disdain is well known for extraordinary graces, such as visions, rapts, supernatural utterances, etc.; but detachment from all such things, we would reply, far from weakening our argument, tends rather to confirm it. We also condemn, in language as strong as any used by St. John, the desire for the extraordinary graces which do at times accompany mystical prayer itself; and to confound the two would be to commit a grave mistake.[2] So that it comes to this—viz.,

[1] *Fond. de la Vie spirit.*, book iii., ch. i.

[2] Père Poulain, in his *Mystique de Saint-Jean de la Croix*, p. 46, note 1, suggests the distinction of these two unlike

that while, in accordance with the teaching of Alvarez de Paz, we condemn the desire for visions, revelations, supernatural utterance, etc., we consider ourselves at liberty to proclaim the lawfulness of the desire for mystical contemplation. And in saying this, we are but echoing St. John of the Cross. No one, indeed, has more worthily celebrated the joys of mystical union than he, or more ardently desired them. It is precisely for the reason that these extraordinary states appeared to him as elements likely to trouble this union that he was so opposed to them, and showed himself pitiless to condemn the presumption to covet them.

St. Teresa witnesses with great clearness to the right which the soul has to desire mystical benefits. She declares that we are all invited to this banquet, and she promises to every soul of good will that God will give her to drink of the living water. " Consider," she writes, " how

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forms of grace by means of terms which accentuate, if not their opposition one to another, at least their very different natures. He gives to mystical union itself—that union which it is lawful to aim at—the name of *grâce indéique*. As regards mystical phenomena—such as visions, revelations, suspensions in mid-air, stigmata, etc., composing a second group—which it is not prudent to aim at or pray for, he calls them *grâces exdéiques*. These expressive neologisms deserve to be added to the vocabulary of Mystical Theology.

Our Lord invites us all, and we may not doubt the truth of His words, for He is Himself the Truth. If this banquet were not general, the invitation would not be for all; and even if He did invite us, He would not say, 'I will give you to drink.' He might have said, 'Come, all of you; you shall lose nothing in serving Me. As to the celestial water, I shall give it to those to drink as I please.' But seeing that He puts no restriction, either on the invitation or on the promise, I feel certain that only those who loiter on the road will fail to drink of this living water. May Our Lord, who gives the promise, accord to us the grace to seek it in the proper manner."[1]

A seventeenth-century writer on spiritual subjects, whom we like to quote on account of his well-balanced judgment, M. Courbon, replying to the repugnance which certain souls feel to asking God for infused graces, which are of pure liberality on his part, quotes St. Teresa on behalf of what he would urge, as we shall see. "Charity," he says, "and faith, and hope are none of them virtues which we can gain for ourselves; they are above the reach of all our efforts. It belongs to God only to give them to us when He pleases. But who doubts that I

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch. xx.

may aspire to them, ask for them ; and that it is my duty to dispose myself to receive them ? Does not the same apply to the gifts of prayer, which are most effectual means for increasing not only my faith, my hope, and my charity, but every other virtue ? It is true that the expression, 'Extraordinary prayer,' which is given to this intimate intercourse, frightens many people, but without reason ; for if by this word 'extraordinary,' infused prayer is signified, all the gifts of the Holy Ghost would be feared, since they are all infused and supernatural. If we mean that such prayer is uncommon, I admit it ; but with whom lies the fault ? St. Teresa will answer the question: 'There are many souls,' she says, 'who reach this prayer' (she is speaking of the first degree in mystical prayer), 'but few who pass beyond it, and I do not know where the fault lies—certainly not with God.'[1] You see here," concludes Courbon, "that St. Teresa feels (1) that many reach mystical prayer; (2) that if there are few who pass beyond, the fault lies with them, not with God, who would not fail to grant this favour if He found them disposed to receive it."[2]

[1] *Life of St. Teresa*, ch. xv.
[2] *Instr. sur l'Oraison*, part iv., inst. 3.

The writers whom we have quoted declare, then, that the desire for the Mystical Life is a very right one. A Dominican, Thomas of Vallgornera, goes further, and teaches that it is a duty. "All should aim at Supernatural Contemplation," is the title of his work on the subject. And why are we all obliged to aspire to this contemplation? Because, replies Vallgornera, God calls us all; His call is to a common vocation. Can it be denied, indeed, that we are all called to holiness? Was Our Lord's command, "Be ye holy, as I also am holy," addressed to a select few, or to all Christians? Now is not the call to holiness the same as the call to the Mystical Life? And is not the Mystical Life the surest means for reaching holiness? "It is profitable to all," says Vallgornera, "to aim at a very perfect humility, a very perfect gentleness, and all the other virtues brought to the highest degree of perfection. Why should it be less profitable to aim at the highest form of prayer? It is expedient for us to aim at great holiness; will it be less so to pray ardently for it in order thereby to glorify God?"[1]

This thesis of Vallgornera will seem, perhaps, daring. We have quoted it here, not to make

[1] *Mystica Théol.*, quæst. 3, disput. 3.

it our own, but in order to reassure the timid who still nourish doubts concerning the lawfulness of the desire for the Mystical Life. These timorous souls will observe that the lawfulness of the desire for the Mystical Life is only a minimum, and that, for the writers who form the vanguard, this desire is not only lawful ; it constitutes an obligation.

3. We pause here to answer a very natural question — viz., To what degree is mystical contemplation accessible to us ? Can we reach up to it by ourselves, endeavour to attain to it ? As regards simple contemplation, the endeavour is lawful ; it does not exceed the limit of power available to souls with the ordinary help of grace.

Is it the same with mystical contemplation ? No ; this latter must always be the result, not of our personal energy, but of the Divine munificence. Here, again, we will allow Alvarez de Paz to speak : " It is one thing to desire a benefit ; quite other is our personal effort to obtain it. The desire, for example, to be rich, is very different from all the care and application necessary to become rich. Now, in the case of mystical contemplation, as both the desire and request for it are lawful, so any effort of our own will to fasten our spirit in God and to

suspend His natural laws would be both absurd and vain. In this regard an abyss yawns between ordinary prayer and mystical contemplation. We may desire the former, and may endeavour to practise it; while with the latter, if the desire for it is lawful, the effort to realize this desire would be useless.

"Two comparisons will make my meaning clearer. You can have the desire to walk, or run, or jump; to this desire you can add its realization. You can in reality walk, run, or jump; they are acts which do not exceed your natural powers. But would it not be absurd for you to wish to fly—spread your arms like wings, and soar up to the sky? If God had given wings to some men, you might well ask for the same gift; but your efforts to fly would only provoke laughter. You might, equally, wish for a stream to flow through your garden to water it, and there is nothing to prevent your turning aside the water from any lake or river so as to bring it into your garden. But would your efforts ever cause the rain to descend on your garden? You might pray, like Elijah, for rain, nothing better; but the rainfall itself would be owing to no effort of yours.

"Now, ordinary prayer is like running, or walking, or jumping—viz., it raises you a little

from the ground; together with turning aside the water of a river to bring it into your garden, it is something you can do by yourself with the aid of grace; but in mystical contemplation, wherein God holds the soul fixed in Himself, suspended in His presence, in the which He Himself embraces it in love, this contemplation is the flight of the soul, the rain which falls upon it from Heaven. You can desire it, you can ask for it; but if God does not Himself cause the rain to fall, if He does not give you wings, you will strive in vain to raise yourself thereto.

"A breath of wind raises the straw lying on the ground, and holds it suspended in the air. When the wind drops, the straw falls again to the ground. Even so it is the breath of the Holy Spirit which suspends the intellectual faculties, and which inflames the will with love. So soon as the breath ceases to sustain the soul, it returns again to the things which are seen. We do not want to say that the intelligence and will are deprived of activity by reason of the Divine agency, for the understanding truly acts and the will truly loves, but that they are not capable of accomplishing acts of such perfection without the extraordinary aid of God.

"We can, indeed, prepare ourselves for con-

templation by a great purity of life, by self-abnegation, and by sacrifice ; so much we can do ; but to attain to that contemplation, if God Himself does not raise us thereto, is impossible."[1]

4. Should the desire for contemplation be of such an absorbing nature as to detach the soul from all exterior occupation, making it consider what was spent in other ways as time lost ?

Let us hear the wise answer which Alvarez de Paz gives to this question. "It is certain that to interrupt contemplation in order to do some act, in itself good and praiseworthy, could but increase the soul's fervour, and bring it more light. The solitaries were accustomed to map out their day, having certain fixed hours for manual labour, convinced that alternate times for prayer and for work would make their prayer easier. The bow loses its strength if always stretched ; so the spirit loses its fervour if ceaselessly occupied with celestial things. We must not, then, renounce all exterior occupation, but regulate exterior activity. Now, to regulate your activity consists in giving up all occupations which are superfluous and useless, and which are not in accordance with your condition ; for if you abandon yourself to such,

[1] Alvarez de Paz, *De Nat. Contempl.*, ch. xiii.

you will find yourself both carried away by a thousand anxieties and a thousand useless desires, and also hindered from attending to God and your soul.

"As regards such actions as are agreeable to your condition and the duties entrusted to you, you must beware of omitting them in order to attend to contemplation. They may seem to be an obstacle or hindrance to contemplation, but in reality they do but render the soul more fit and alert for this great act. You will, then, not neglect in any way the duties of your condition, well assured that, when the time for rest comes, God will know how to indemnify you by a more abundant nourishment. Nevertheless, you should, in exterior acts, bring to bear a very pure intention of pleasing God, and you should be careful of His friendship. Take care that, when undertaking any good action, your spirit never loses its calm nor liberty, and that during the business itself it remains quiet, and that its facility for contemplation is in nowise diminished. Whatever our exterior occupations may be, and whatsoever we might undertake for the good of our neighbour, it is prayer which will prevent our losing our aptitude for contemplation."[1]

[1] Lib. v., pars. 1, ch. vii.

It is seasonable here to offer a few words of reply to a prejudice existing in the minds of a number of persons who consider the Mystical Life incompatible with the duties of the apostolate. The Mystical Life belongs exclusively to orders of contemplatives ; for souls vowed to an active life of charity it is a luxury, almost a hindrance, to their ministry. Is it so rare, even to-day, to hear such an opinion put forward in the most oracular tones ? If there is anyone interested in perpetuating this prejudice, it is the devil. He is well aware that those from whom he has received the hardest knocks have always been men whose lives were at once apostolic and contemplative. He knows what an enemy he had in a St. Vincent Ferrer, who travelled all over Europe preaching to the multitudes, and leading them upwards after him, he himself seeking all the while in the joys of the most exalted contemplation a constant source of renewed inspiration. He knows what a stubborn adversary he had in a St. Ignatius, who, moved by humility, consigned to the flames the manuscript on which he had written his revelations concerning the Divine essence vouchsafed to him during his ecstasies ; and in a St. Francis Xavier, who, as a rest from preaching, had himself locked up for the night in the belfry of Goa

in order to give himself up uninterruptedly to contemplation.

Would it be daring to assert that all the saints canonized by the Church had experience of the Mystical Life, and that the greater number were raised to the highest degree of that Life—viz., to the Celestial Espousals? This opinion, which it is quite lawful to hold, is a frontal blow to the prejudice even to-day too firmly believed—viz., that the mystical is incompatible with the apostolic life; it helps us to understand how contemplation, far from neutralizing practical occupations, becomes the element therein most likely to inspire them, their most powerful support, and the surest guarantee of their success.

The prejudice which we withstand is not new. Père Lallemand found it already in his path in the seventeenth century, and refuted it in an article entitled, "That contemplation, far from being a hindrance to the apostolic life, is necessary thereto."[1] To quote a few extracts:

"Contemplation never hinders zeal in souls; on the contrary, it is an incentive thereto by reason of three considerations with which it permeates them.

"(*a*) That souls are capable of possessing God, that there is not one, therefore, which is

[1] 7e *Principe*, ch. iv., art. iv.

not incomparably more precious than both the heavens and the earth together, with all the grandeur and riches which they contain.

"(*b*) That all souls belong to the Son of God; that He gave His life to redeem them, and has washed them in His blood; and seeing that they constitute His heritage and His kingdom, there is no labour which should not be undertaken, and no trouble which should not be undergone for their salvation and for their advancement.

"(*c*) The consideration of a soul in a state of sin; how far from the way of happiness; how near to the gate of Hell.

"These considerations were such as to make St. Paul desire to be anathema for the sake of his brethren; and many saints desire to suffer the pains of Hell without sin, if God should so permit, in order to prevent the loss of one soul. It was thus with St. Catherine of Siena, St. Catherine of Bologna, and Alphonso Rodriguez.

"If possessed of the grace of contemplation, it is possible to do more in one month both for oneself and for others than without it one could do in ten years."

The same writer goes even further, and suggests that persons who are not contemplatives should only give themselves to active work with moderation; "for those," he writes, "who have

not received this excellent gift, it is dangerous to become too much absorbed in works for the good of one's neighbour; they should only be undertaken as an experiment, unless under obedience."

We are here far from the suspicious attitude maintained by some regarding contemplation, and its effect on the apostolic life. Would that we could once and for all silence such prejudice, and recall the fact that our ideal of holiness, supported by the joys of the Mystical Life, is the only really human ideal—human in the true sense of the word—the only one which takes into consideration the weakness of human nature. It is by reason of this weakness that we ask for the mystical joys as a compensation for the sufferings of the saints, and the heroic labours undertaken by them. It is irony towards our poor human nature to pretend that such a burden would be borne with ease or joy, assisted by the ordinary aids of grace, or that sufficient compensation could be found in the joys of ordinary devotion. "This overlooks the fact that our Saviour Himself, even on the Cross, still enjoyed His intuitive vision." There have not been wanting Pharisees who lightly value the mystical joys, and esteem them unnecessary to the lofty aims of the apostolic life, while they themselves are incapable of making the smallest sacrifice, or

of bearing the least humiliation. But it is the Mystical Life alone, with its delicious joys, which accounts for the happiness of tears, desire of suffering, and passion to sacrifice oneself for God, which we find in the saints. Anyone refusing to enter into the inner life of the saints, anyone obstinately shutting his eyes to that sublime reality in order to study only the external, would find it almost impossible to understand the extraordinary saying of a St. Teresa, "One must either suffer or die," or the other saying more extraordinary still, of a St. John of the Cross: "To suffer and not to die." One would be driven to accept a rationalistic explanation, and would see in those sayings only the manifestation of a morbid exaltation. Whether the saints were leading apostolic lives, or vowed exclusively to contemplation, their life remains an insoluble mystery, to which the mystical joys alone can give the key. Alas! that such a small proportion of their historians have, in our opinion, taken the trouble to elucidate this most interesting side of their life!

The following quotation is from the pen of a contemporary writer, who, in happily expressed terms, defends contemplation from the reproach of being a hindrance to an active life: "That the active life of the saints is stimulated by con-

templation is not a paradox. M. Renan regards the life of the saints as opposed to that of men of action, under pretext that the former are idealists — men given to contemplation and prayer. His error is that of many others; it is none the less grave and amazing.

"Action is imposed on the saints by their desire of suffering, and above all by the meaning which the latter has for them. That which they love has nothing in it of sadness—for this they have no words bad enough. The sufferings which the saints are fond of are those of an active nature—sufferings (the word is always on their lips) which bring to birth: the labour-pains of a soul which is being born, or born again, into the spiritual life; the birth of a home, of a new city; the birth of an institution which hatred is trying to prevent; the birth of an order of things, laborious, learned, and charitable—in fact, the birth of a church; and true mystics, one and all, pronounce this bringing to birth to be at once both the result and the sign of love."[1]

The mystic is always something of an apostle to the outside world: he is impelled by missionary zeal; such is the conclusion of M. Joly. It is not, indeed, pressing his conclusion too far to

[1] H. Joly, *Psychologie des Saints*, pp. 187, 188.

affirm that those vowed exclusively to contemplation are also apostles, and that no apostolate is so fruitful as theirs. In spite of their strict enclosure, in spite of the barriers which separate their members from the external scene of the Church's destinies, the contemplative orders are, in reality, militant orders, fighting institutions. St. Teresa is very outspoken on this point: "Those whom God has drawn together into our monasteries," she says, "must not contemplate only their cells, but must help their neighbour, and feel a burning desire to assist him." "What!" she exclaims in another place; "should we stand idly by with folded arms when the heretics wish to condemn Our Lord again, and overturn His empire!"

Despite his unbelief, the militant aspect of the constitution of Carmel has not escaped the notice of a modern rationalist, Edgar Quinet, who, with an insight in which many Catholic historians are wanting, thus describes St. Teresa's attitude towards Protestantism: "Teresa was the true enemy of the Reformation. She founded an Order to fight it *by prayer, by tears, and by love.*" And he adds, "No such groanings have been heard since the descent from Golgotha."[1]

In the ages when people understood that the

[1] *De la Renaissance.*

hidden and secret action of prayer is more powerful than that which is on the surface and noisy, to live near one of those houses of prayer seemed to our fathers a boon which could not be too dearly bought. The district in which there was no Carmelite house would have seemed to lack one of the first elements of Catholic life. May we be permitted, in bringing this chapter to a close, to express a hope that these houses may increase amongst us. We are in need of such a *corps d'élite* in our midst who will supply what is lacking in our softness by their austerities, in our indifference by their unceasing prayer, in our dissipations by their silence. What we are in want of is that out of the midst of our guilty society should arise souls vowed to a life of expiation, in order to arrest the arm of God ever ready to fall, thus justifying the saying of St. Jerome: "The saints bear up the world and stave off its impending ruin by the force of their prayers."

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST DISPOSITION: PERSEVERANCE IN THE PRACTICE OF MENTAL PRAYER

1. Is it a sign of extreme pessimism to regret that so few people nowadays are addicted to mental prayer? Are we unjust in declaring that many souls, called by their circumstances to perfection, have relinquished the practice of this prayer? In default of traditional teaching, common sense alone should be sufficient to show how dangerous it is to give up this practice. I am not aware that, apart from prayer, there exists any other way in which these souls can retrieve their waste of strength, protect themselves against allurements from outside, and maintain their footing on the heights on which they are bound to dwell if they are not to be unfaithful to their vocation.

And among the souls of good will who remain faithful to prayer, how many have any suspicion that there are divers degrees therein—indeed, a whole series of progressive steps up-

wards towards God? How many confine their ambition to a successful morning meditation, and think that the entire strategy of prayer is comprised in the combating of drowsiness and distractions? Those who are good judges attribute the rarity of the Mystical Life in our day to this ignorance of the science of mental prayer which is so necessary for us. Many remain on the lowest step for want of knowledge that there is any step higher; they never get beyond meditation as they were accustomed to practise it at the seminary or in the novitiate, or during the early days of their conversion; they remain thus in ignorance of the successive initiations which, in the scheme of providence, without violating the natural law, prepare the soul for the appearance of the Mystical Life.

We can, then, rightly point to a practice of this prayer, at once constant and persevering, as the first, and one of the most efficacious, dispositions for the birth of the Mystical Life. Courbon,[1] indeed, calls this the most necessary and the most important disposition. According to him it is, as it were, the foundation and first principle on which all the rest depends.

Alvarez de Paz witnesses to this importance, supplying a reason which will impress the minds

[1] *Entr. Spirit.*, p. 131.

of all ; it is precisely this hour of prayer which God chooses to pour out upon a soul the Mystical Life. How imprudent, then, to forsake prayer for any reason whatever ! Would it not be to risk missing the hour of grace ? We would, then, advise persons tempted to give way under the weight of discouragement and to abandon their prayer, seriously to consider this weighty utterance of Alvarez de Paz : " The exercises of mental prayer must be practised resolutely and unswervingly ; they must never be abandoned either on account of aridities or of any exterior occupations whatever, which might demand your attention. During the hour which you consecrate to such prayer you may receive the grace of contemplation. Now, you do not know the day which God will choose for giving you the experience of this great blessing. Do not, then, desert your prayer without some grave reason ; your soul might happen to miss the wholesome rainfall of Divine grace ; and, by reason of your inconstancy, you would lose the most precious of all blessings, perhaps for many years—perhaps for ever."[1]

In many passages in her works St. Teresa intercedes with those who have not yet entered on the way of mental prayer. She burns to

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. xi.

make them partakers of the holy inebriations which she has tasted during this exercise, and the Divine power which she has drawn thence. She sets herself to smooth the way for them, to prove to them that all the impossibilities which they conjure up are only spectres or phantoms which disappear as soon as we try to handle them. We shall find in the saint a guide of great value in this work of preparing souls for the Divine action.

All who are commencing mental prayer will find one temptation awaiting them — a very dangerous temptation, and one which checks the progress of many a soul—a very subtle temptation, because it masquerades under the form of humility: it is discouragement. St. Teresa has known these crises of the soul, and expresses her sympathy with those who pass through this trial. She gently reassures them, and beseeches them not to play into Satan's hands by abandoning their prayer. The devil knows well that souls given to prayer are souls lost to him, and that the salvation of those souls is assured. He multiplies obstacles in their way: he strives to persuade them that they were not made for the high places of the spiritual life, and that it is far better to stay where they are to-day than to have to retrace their steps

to-morrow. St. Teresa counsels those souls to meet the solicitations of the enemy from the first with a resolute determination to persevere in spite of every obstacle. She invites them to arm themselves with such a manly resolution as will put an end to their uncertainties, and determine all their waverings. To refuse all discussion with the enemy, and to each one of his attacks to be content to oppose, like a wall, a resolute will to persevere in prayer, whatever the cost. Such is the strategy which the saint counsels here, in the name of the faith and in the name of good sense.

"What should be the dispositions," she asks, "of such as set out on their journey with a sincere desire never to pause till they have reached the goal—that is to say, till they have quenched their thirst at the very source of the living waters? First, and above all, they must have a firm and immovable resolution never to pause in their journey till they have reached the fountain of life. They should keep continually advancing, no matter what obstacles occur, what difficulties intervene, should faintness be felt on the road, should doubts arise as to whether the journey can be accomplished, should they die on the way, or should the whole world with all that it contains crumble beneath them, nothing should

stop them. Neither must they listen to the senseless discourse of those enslaved by the world which so often rings in their ears: 'This path is strewn with rocks; so-and-so was lost there; another lost his way, yet another was unable to avoid falling, although he never ceased to pray; thus is it that virtue is made contemptible; no woman should attempt the journey for they are too prone to illusions; let them rest content with the simple and obscure occupations which are the lot of their sex without seeking for such refinements in prayer.' Pay no attention, my daughters, to the fears with which many would inspire you, or to the dangers they suggest. In truth, their manner of reasoning is pleasant! What! There is a great treasure at the end of a road infected with robbers; will they pretend that it can be carried off without running any risk? Look for a moment at persons in the world. Would they allow their treasures to be seized without resistance—they who pass many sleepless nights without giving a single moment's rest to either body or soul for a mere nothing?

"As to you, my daughters, you are going to the conquest of a treasure, wholly Divine, and one which must be removed by main force, according to the saying of Our Lord: 'The violent take it by force.' The road you tread is

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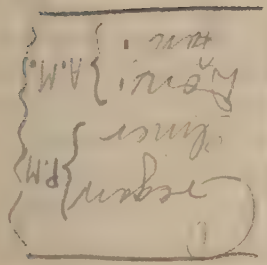

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[illegible] we have resolved to spend with Him, especially seeing that it is to our interest to act in this manner, and that we reap such precious advantages thereby? Would it be seemly, instead of offering Him our time as a gift, to offer it to Him only on loan

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxii.

with an intention of withdrawing it? Certainly not. A friend does not behave thus to his friend, and abstain from grieving him by asking back that which he has given to him, and which he knows to be useful to him. Alas! we spend so much of our time either on ourselves, or on others who do not care for it; that at least we might give wholeheartedly, and with a spirit free from all strange thoughts, those few moments which we consecrate to the Celestial Spouse. Let the gift be made with a firm resolution never to take it back again, no matter how tedious or troublesome we should find it, nor what drynesses should befall us. Let us consider these hours as no longer our own, so that, even if we did not wish to give them entirely to God, they might still be claimed from us with justice.

"The second reason why we should be firm in our resolve to persevere in the holy exercise of prayer is that it is then more difficult for Satan to tempt us. There is nothing he fears like steadfast and resolute souls; he knows by experience the harm they cause him, and that everything he does to hurt them only turning to their profit and the benefit of many others, he ends by retiring vanquished from the battle. If, on the one hand, the devil is hindered by

cowardice from attacking those who are on their guard, on the other hand, his malice gives him a great advantage over those who are negligent. Directly he observes any signs of fickleness in a soul, or of an irresolute will to persevere in well-doing, he disquiets that soul with a thousand fears, and suggests one difficulty after another till he leaves it not a moment's peace.

"I come now to the third reason why we should persevere. A man fights with much greater courage who has said to himself that, come what may, he will never run away. He is like a man who, in a battle, fears the enemy's blows less, because the thought is ever present with him that he can only escape death by victory. Besides courage, we ought, in the combat of prayer, to bring the firm assurance that, unless we allow ourselves to be defeated, our efforts will be crowned with success; and that, however small may be our share of the booty after the victory, we shall always be very rich."[1]

So firm ought this resolution to be to persevere in prayer, that illness itself should not cause it to waver. "Illness is not a legitimate reason for interrupting an exercise where, in default of bodily strength, love and custom are sufficient. God always makes it easy for us as

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxiv.

soon as we have the desire for it. I say always, and I say it purposely, because if sometimes illness or other obstacles do not leave us any long hours of solitude, there are still moments when we can hold converse with God. For the soul who loves, true prayer, either during illness or in the midst of obstacles, consists in offering to God that which it suffers, in calling Him to mind, in conforming itself to His holy will, and in a thousand other acts of this nature which suggest themselves. Thus does it exercise its love. No violent effort is necessary in order to enter into this intimate converse, and then, even when God deprives us through suffering of our accustomed times of prayer, we are able, I repeat, to enrich ourselves with very great benefits by ever so little watchfulness."[1]

2. The devil succeeds with some souls by certain tactics against which it is well to warn them. He fortifies himself against these souls by suggesting to them the remembrance of their past faults, bringing these again before their eyes, at the same time exaggerating their present misery as much as possible: and he leads them to infer that they are not worthy to present themselves before God in prayer. St. Teresa exhorts them to turn the devil's own weapons against himself.

[1] *Life*, ch. vii.

How invaluable, in reality, is this picture of their misery displayed before their eyes in such vivid colours! Even though the colours are perhaps too crude and too darkly tinged, it is none the less true that the soul can find in them occasion for self-humiliation, and for realizing its own wretchedness. Is such self-knowledge, then, nothing? Scupoli, in his *Spiritual Combat*, reckons that "the recognition of our nothingness is an essential condition of the spiritual life."[1]

Not less positive is St. Teresa, who invites the soul to be pleased with the picture which the devil conjures up before it, and assures it that a most valuable benefit will accrue from contemplating such a spectacle, if, to a self-distrust, there be added an immovable confidence in God. The conclusion to be drawn is the necessity of seeking more than ever a remedy for those miseries in prayer; this is certainly not the result on which the devil had speculated. "How inestimable is the treasure with which God enriches a soul in preparing it for a life of prayer by drawing it inwardly thereto! Though it may not respond as it ought to such a great grace, nevertheless if it persevere in spite of temptations, in spite of sins, and in spite of the thousand ways in which it may

[1] *Life*, ch. i.

fall, or in which the devil will try to drag it, Our Lord will, I am sure, bring it into the harbour of refuge as He has condescended to bring me.

"As I have had experience, I will allow myself to say that whatever faults they may commit who are commencing mental prayer, they must not relinquish it. It is through prayer that they will be able to correct those faults; without it, the difficulty will be much greater. They must be equally on their guard against the devil, who, under pretence of humility, will tempt them to renounce the holy exercise, as he has tempted me."[1]

3. At the outset of the spiritual life, every soul must expect to go through certain crises, and to undergo certain trials which may present themselves under various forms, but which, in the language of ascetic theology, are grouped under the generic term of *spiritual aridities*. There are none of the souls for whom we are writing who have not experienced this sad condition, so we do not consider it necessary to describe it. We think it will be more opportune to recall the fact that, far from being a cause of discouragement to a soul, these trials should suggest to it hope and comfort. If the soul never had this

[1] *Life*, ch. viii.

occasion for asserting that it remains faithful to God in spite of the withdrawal of all sensible piety, might it not nurse a secret doubt as to the purity of its love, and the disinterestedness of its devotion ?

In thus expressing myself, I am only summarizing the doctrine of every spiritual writer concerning these interior troubles. A few quotations will be sufficient to show that I am faithfully interpreting their teaching.

Here, to begin with, are words in which St. Teresa expresses herself on this subject : "On certain days," she says, "the poor gardener will find it impossible to lift his arms—I mean to have one single good thought. What will he do in such an extremity ? He will rejoice and will console himself, regarding his work in the garden of so great a Monarch as a favour reserved for those of highest renown. Certain as he is of pleasing Him by his work, he will aim at no further satisfaction. He will never tire of offering thanks to his Master for the favour which He shows him ; seeing that, although this supreme Master gives nothing to His gardener, He counts upon him and upon his zeal to cultivate the garden confided to him. In the midst of this interior dryness, the disciple's duty is to assist his Divine Master to carry that

cross with which He was laden during His whole life. He must accept this desolatory aridity even to his last breath, not seeking his kingdom here below, and never abandoning his prayer; and he must not allow Jesus Christ to fall under the weight of the cross. A time will come when this adorable Saviour will reward him for it all. No, no, he has no reason to fear for the fruits of his labours. He serves a good Master, Whose gaze is constantly fixed on him. Let him not be anxious about bad thoughts, remembering that the devil tempted St. Jerome in the desert after the same manner. Affliction endured during mental prayer has its value. This holy exercise has been for many years so full of trouble to me, that I have looked upon it as a favour from God when I have been able to draw a single drop from that sacred well. I know how very great these troubles are, and in my estimation more courage is necessary to bear them, than for the endurance of many a worldly misfortune. But as I have clearly seen, God compensates them by a splendid reward 'even in this life.'"[1]

"When the soul has resolved to walk rigorously in the path of virtue," writes Père Surin, "and to refuse God nothing, Our Lord, seeing her

[1] *Life*, ch. xi.

large purpose, provides all that is necessary for the success of this enterprise by means of interior labours; this is the spiritual life, as it were, at full speed. 'It is necessary,' says a great spiritual writer, 'to travel through great deserts and by long nights'—*i.e.*, to endure great aridities and long periods of darkness, in order that the soul may be weaned, not only from exterior and temporal things, but from itself, or from the self-love which is natural to it. This is brought about by the removal of supernatural delights, by the withdrawal of celestial sweetnesses, and by the combating of temptations. This gives the soul cause to exert herself so many times, and to protest so often that she desires to belong to God, that, through constant and energetic mental effort, she at length becomes largely habituated to what is good."[1]

Courbon has excellently summarized the teaching concerning the withdrawal of sensible graces; the reader will find here the qualities which are distinctive of that writer, and which make the charm of his little treatises—viz., a great simplicity of expression, combined with a remarkable solidity of doctrine. "God deprives us of sensible graces for five principal reasons:

"(1) To put us to the test. He wishes to see

[1] *Fond. de la Vie Spirit.*, book i., ch. vii.

if we really love Him, or whether it is only His gifts which are the object of our love; if it is for Him that we make our prayer, or for our own satisfaction, He wishes to see whether we have the courage to serve Him at our cost. There is nothing wonderful in making our prayer as long as we are sensible of consolations; but it is something to do so when we have to pay a price for it, and when we meet only with rebuffs. If we persevere in the face of privations, doing our duty the while, we are, in truth, unprofitable servants, as we are told in Holy Scripture; but if we give up our prayer, we declare ourselves mercenaries, and servants whose service is prompted by self-interest.

"(2) God deprives us of His sensible graces in order to influence our love for Him the more. We see this by the example of friendships in the world, which diminish in intensity if the friends meet too often, but rekindle when they are parted for a short time, or if the friendship meets with rebuffs. So St. Catherine of Siena called the withdrawals and returnings of the sensible presence of Our Lord, *des jeux d'amour;* which meant to say that all that was done, was done to inflame our love.

"(3) God deprives us of His sensible graces in order to give us occasion to apply ourselves

to many good works which we should have been tempted to abandon, had we been continually drawn to prayer. For instance, those who have undertaken the saving of souls might forsake their cure; those accustomed to do much good by visiting the sick might cease to visit them; each one might wish to secure solitude, and good works would cease.

"(4) God deprives us of His sensible graces in order that we should realize their price, and so value them more highly. It is certain that we become satiated with the best things if we have them too often; we grow tired of the most delicate food if we have too great an abundance of it; and as the proverb has it, *familiarity breeds contempt*. Things which are rare are much more appreciated than those which are common, although the latter are often the best. It is, therefore, fitting that we should, from time to time, be deprived of sensible graces, for fear that in the long run we should not sufficiently esteem and value them.

"(5) Finally, God sometimes deprives us of His sensible graces as a chastisement for our unfaithfulness; good use has not been made of the graces which Our Lord has granted to us, so He chastises us by depriving us of them. It is not always possible to know whether this

deprivation is a chastisement or not; but it is always good to ask for pardon for the unfaithfulnesses of which we have been guilty, and of those of which we are not cognizant, after which we must remain patient, awaiting God's return."[1]

4. Now that we have demonstrated the part played by aridities, and justified God's wisdom on that point, we must turn our attention to a question of some delicacy—viz., whether it is lawful to ask God for the cessation of aridities. Many seventeenth and eighteenth century authors reply that it is the more perfect part not to address this request to God. This is, even to-day, the advice of many contemporary writers. To souls tortured by these interior sufferings they give such consolation as the following: Cast yourself down at the foot of the cross! This is, no doubt, all very well, but is there nothing else to be done? May we likewise encourage these poor souls who suffer so much, by counselling earnest prayers to God for deliverance from the trial? A reply in the affirmative is, we think, a faithful interpretation of traditional teaching. We will now go quickly through the reasons which suggest this solution:

(1) Aridities, like scruples and other interior

[1] *Instr. sur l'Oraison*, part i., inst. 10.

sufferings, are maladies of the soul; it is proper, then, that they should be guarded against.

(2) All writers point to certain means, certain practices for guarding against them. They praise, for instance, recollection, or a more careful preparation for prayer. Now, is it proper to neglect the best way of all—viz., a request?

(3) If there are means of avoiding aridities, it is indispensable that we should use them. Thus fervent souls *must* beg for the grace of deliverance.

(4) That aridities are profitable to us, a fact which we just now brought forward, does not contradict our thesis. This profitableness is only a reality in so far as we *do all we can* to be rid of the condition.

There is nothing more depressing for souls than the error we have been combating. So when souls, so tortured, have had the true doctrine put before them, they become quickly consoled, and feel renewed courage in them to fight for the great virtues. It is, then, time to break with a rigorism from which we have only too greatly suffered.

5. Souls who have entered into the second mansion—*i.e.*, who have already made some

progress in prayer, these souls, according to the witness of St. Teresa, suffer more than those in the first mansion; their suffering is of a special nature which, it seems to me, might be called a commencement of Divine pain. The condition which we have to dread in our relations with God is not that of suffering, of painful anxiety produced by the recollection of having offended God. The condition which we must dread is the resigning of ourselves to that tepidity of soul which no longer causes us any pain.

Here is the explanation which St. Teresa gives of that suffering which is for her such a happy augury: "In the first mansion the soul is deaf and dumb; she does not hear the Divine call, and in no way suffers at failure to respond to it. In the second mansion a part of the infirmity has been cured—the soul is no longer deaf, she hears God calling. But she is still dumb, she feels incapable of answering Him, and this causes her pain. She feels her misery, she puts her finger on it, she knows that she should be quite other than she is, and torn between her lofty aspirations and her great feebleness, she suffers at every instant from the contradictions which she finds in herself. They have more to suffer because, in the first mansion, the souls are like

deaf-mutes, who, being deprived of speech and hearing, endure more patiently the pain of not speaking at all, while in the second mansion they are like persons who hear but who are dumb, and thus are much more troubled at not being able to speak. The condition of those who do not hear is, nevertheless, not the most desirable, because it is after all a great advantage to hear what is said to us. And such is the happiness enjoyed by the souls in the second mansion, for they hear the Lord's voice when He calls them. As they enter further into the castle, and find themselves nearer to the King of Glory, they feel the effects of having so good a neighbour. It is true that they are still in the midst of business, and pleasures, and amusements, and vanities of the world, and they go falling into sin and raising themselves up again, because it is almost impossible, but that the venomous brutes, in whose company they still continue, should cause them to stumble ; but the pity and kindness of the adorable Master whom they serve are so great, and He is so desirous that they should love Him, and should strive to approach Him, that He continues to call them, and after a manner so sweet, that they are miserable at not being able to do at once what He commands them. Thus it may

truly be said that these souls suffer more than if they were deaf to His voice."[1]

6. Knowing how feeble these are, and that discouragement can still easily reach them, St. Teresa invites them to stand firm against every assault, and above all not to dream of building in a few days an edifice which can only be raised slowly, and at the cost of persevering efforts.

"How many poor souls turn back for want of strength to endure these assaults! How I should like to enlighten these souls, and warn them not to lose courage! With this end, I will make use of an illustration which explains to perfection what I mean: that which deceives them and throws them into despair is that they want to fly before God has given them wings. They begin with great fervour, with grand desires, and a firm resolution to advance in virtue. But what happens next? They see other souls, further advanced, raised already by the grace of God to heroic virtues, and they feel that they cannot attain to their level. This is not all: they read in treatises on prayer of divers means for raising themselves to the most sublime contemplation, and not yet having the strength to put this into practice,

[1] *Interior Castle*, Second Mansion, ch. i.

they are grieved, and lose courage. These books tell them to scorn the judgments of the world, and to be content that it should speak evil of us rather than good; that we should hold our reputation in no esteem; that detachment from relations should be absolute; and many other things of this kind. But, in my opinion, these things are purely the Lord's gifts; sentiments so contrary to our own inclinations ought to be classed among the good things of the supernatural order. So let these souls cease to grieve if they are not able all at once to raise themselves to such a height; let them trust themselves without reserve to the goodness of God; one day He will change their desires into results, provided that they persevere in their prayer, and make, on their part, every effort which is in their power. Seeing that we are so weak, it is greatly needful for us to develop in our souls great confidence, never to allow ourselves to be cast down, and let us ceaselessly encourage ourselves with the thought that by constant efforts is our victory assured."[1]

The venerable Louis of Grenada makes gentle fun of those fickle persons who, to use his own expression, can do nothing better than weave and unravel Penelope's web. "They undertake

[1] *Life*, ch. xxxi.

an enterprise," he says, "but after three or four days they abandon it; then, when it is a case of setting to work again, they find as much difficulty as if they had never begun. They put aside both their prayer and their pious exercises at the slightest pretext; they fancy that they are only doing so for three or four days, but it is often for the rest of their lives. When they want to return they can no longer find the door, or perhaps the way seems too difficult for them; so that they end by turning back and taking up their old habits. . . . We must, then, put some method and perseverance into our exercises if we would keep ourselves firmly in the right way. . . . Perseverance in pious practices is, in the opinion of St. Bonaventure, one of the most efficacious means of quickly reaching the height of perfection.

"However slowly one moves, if some advance is made each day, the end of the journey is soon reached; but if, on the contrary, life is spent in turning back, the desired result will certainly never be obtained. . . . To pious exercises should be added constancy in the manner in which they are carried out. Many carry out their exercises every day with regularity; but each day they follow a different method, so that while attempting everything, they accomplish

nothing. . . . There are many paths which lead to God; it is for each one to choose the best according to his taste and to what is suitable; but the choice once made, we must go straight forward."[1]

[1] *De l'Oraison et de la Considér.*, part ii., ch. ii.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND DISPOSITION: THE HABIT OF RECOLLECTION

ARTICLE I.—ITS DEFINITION, ITS ADVANTAGES, AND ITS DIFFICULTIES

1. WE should like to take as a heading for this chapter the saying of St. Teresa: "A soul in a real state of recollection is a true paradise." Alvarez de Paz echoes this sentiment, affirming that recollection is of all the means the most powerful, not only for obtaining the grace of contemplation, but also for reaching perfection. So in his treatise called the *Preparation for Contemplation*, there is no subject which he has developed more fully than that of the practice of recollection. We shall quote largely from this portion of his work, which he has treated with a well-marked preference.

Here is his definition of recollection: "It is the remembrance of God—the thought of God, Who, in all places and under every circumstance,

enables us to see Him present, permits us to hold friendly and respectful converse with Him, and fills us with a desire and love for Himself." Then, according to his custom of joining the pious exhortation to the theological definition, the great mystic cries : "Do you wish to avoid all evils? then never allow the remembrance of God to pass from your mind either in prosperity or in adversity, nor under any circumstances whatever. Never permit to yourself any excuse, such as the difficulty or the importance of the occupations in which you are engaged : you can always remember that the eye of God is upon you, and that He is watching you. If a thousand times an hour you lose the remembrance of His presence, a thousand times an hour must you recall the same. If you find that the continuous practice of this exercise is not possible, try as much as you can to habituate yourself to it; and after the example of those who, in a hard winter, try to get near the fire as often as they can, do you go as often as you can to this burning fire which will warm the soul."[1]

It would seem mere irony to preach recollection to such as are obliged to live in the rush of business, or to those whose lives belong entirely to the world of action. Social life, with its present

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. i.

claims, and with its daily demands, lends itself, it must be confessed, little to the practice of recollection. We would ask, however, that none should take refuge behind this admission, to exempt themselves from all practice of recollection. And besides, there is more than one way of understanding recollection, also of practising it ; it is also certain that neither the professor in his class, nor the missionary in the labours of his apostleship, can know recollection as do the Carthusian or the Carmelite in their cells. We have just heard Alvarez de Paz desire those who are not able to practise this exercise after a continuous manner, to habituate themselves thereto as far as possible. This is a confession that recollection cannot have the same perfection nor continuity for all ; but it is at the same time an affirmation that there is no one to whom it is not possible in a certain measure.

With regard to the definition of recollection which we have given, we ask that no one will attribute to us a meaning which is far from our thoughts. We have, in this definition, wished to describe the ideal towards which men should reach out, and to which they should ceaselessly draw nearer ; but we have not wished to intimate that recollection must be for all with the same perfection. To be so exacting would

be a sure means of discouragement to souls of good will. A scheme for meditation in such a complete form would be a work of great length, a work which, on our part necessitates sustained effort, but whose success depends, before all things, upon a quite special grace of God. To generous souls who will not set a price on their co-operation, we can promise pleasant surprises ; we can give them the assurance that recollection will become established in them much more easily than they had imagined, and that it will bring to them a peace and joy which they had never suspected.

2. Courbon, while studying the advantages of recollection, declares : "That it is not possible for a soul to apply itself faithfully thereto for any considerable time without becoming aware of a surprising change. It will find itself indifferent to everything which was formerly most dear to it ; it will love solitude and retirement ; it will take a singular pleasure in hearing God spoken of, in reading good books, and in intercourse with persons experienced in the spiritual and interior life : in short, its great and only concern will be to advance from day to day in virtue."[1]

Alvarez de Paz is bolder : he declares that this practice makes up for the lack of all the others

[1] *Entr. Spirit.*, edit. Casterman, p. 174.

and he proves it: "I venture to say that this means makes up by itself alone for the other means of reaching perfection and contemplation, and that it includes them all. Take the case of a son or of a servant who is mindful that he is under the eye of his father or his master: everything he does will be in order, and will witness to his respect and to his obedience. The Christian is God's servant and His son; so at the thought that God sees him, everything that he does, whether of an interior or exterior nature, will witness to his respect, to his obedience, to his hatred of evil, and to his love of what is good under every form. Has not St. Paul told us 'to put on Jesus Christ'? Well, this remembrance will be the garment by which we shall put on Jesus Christ."

3. After having praised the benefits of God's presence in rather a general way, Alvarez de Paz goes more methodically into the reasons which stimulate us to practise this exercise, and groups them under four heads:

"First, because it is God's will. Has not God said, 'That we ought always to pray, and not to faint'?[1] Now, how can we be always praying to God if we do not have Him always present? Has Our Lord in this precept separ-

[1] Luke xviii. 1.

ated the continuity of prayer from the continuity of the Divine presence? Certainly not; these two things are closely connected. To pray without thinking of God would be to pray inattentively, and consequently very imperfectly. A similar conclusion results from the greatest of all precepts: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind.'[1] The perfect accomplishment of this precept implies an habitual recollection of God. For if it is true that love is always preceded by understanding, how can one be always loving God without thinking of Him? Do you make a pretence of being united to Him with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with your whole mind, while holding back from Him the best, or one of the best, parts of yourself? You, who so eagerly desire contemplation, and who recite with David so frequently, *I have sought Thy countenance; it is Thy countenance, Lord, which I have sought without ceasing;* you who glory in accomplishing in all things the Divine will, here is this Divine will so clearly explained to you that it is no longer possible for you to plead ignorance of it. God wills that you should always be thinking of Him, always

[1] Matt. xxii. 37.

be loving Him, and that you should be seeking for Him in everything.

"Secondly, the recollection of the presence of God constitutes the true nobility of man. It raises us above our nature, and enables us to participate in the angelic dignity. It makes angels of us by reason of the employment which it brings to us. Wheresoever their duties call them, these celestial spirits always behold the face of God, Who dwells in Heaven; in like manner we, when we are practising this exercise, wherever we are, and whatever we are doing, are contemplating the face of God, if not sensibly, at least with the eye of faith.

"God's presence, again, makes angels of us through purity of mind, in driving away our vain thoughts, in purifying our ill-regulated affections, in suppressing the imperfections which intermingle with our good actions, and in flooding our whole being with an admirable light. It makes angels of us by our occupation, for it gives us the means of being greatly useful to others by our conversation, or at least by our example. We cannot imagine how much influence a person thus habitually united to God has over others, both for their edification and for their well-being. Lastly, it makes angels of us by elevation of sentiment; as the angels

learn disdain for things temporal and visible from the vision of God, so we borrow from the thought of God disdain for everything which falls short of the love of things from on high.

"Thirdly, I say that we are bound by gratitude to hold ourselves thus constantly in the presence of God. If a friend has a right to our remembrance of him after having done us some good action, and when we cease to be in want of him, would it not be a crime to forget him at the very time when he is loading us with his liberalities, helping our distress? O most bounteous God! O God, who lovest us without ever wearying! there is no moment when Thou didst not pour upon us Thy blessings without number. It is from Thee that we receive our being, our life and our power, during every moment of our pilgrimage; and it is Thou that savest us from so many evils and so many dangers. In adversity Thou lavishest upon us Thy consolations; it is from Thy hand that we obtain all the happiness we have. How, then, can we forget Thee? Gratitude for so many blessings demands from us the continual recollection of Thy presence, and moves Thee to fresh liberalities.

"But of all the reasons for this practice of the presence of God, the most powerful should be the desire to imitate the saints on this point.

Since we aspire to saintliness, we are bound to imitate the saints. It is an easy obligation for us ; for is there anything more pleasant than to follow those we love, to set our feet in the track of their feet, on the road which they have followed in such security ? Now, to the saints no practice has been dearer than that of the presence of God. It is the recollection of God as present which has kept them in saintliness ; and when this remembrance has wavered in them, saintliness has wavered in the same degree. This could easily be proved by reference to history."[1]

4. The same writer remarks that the efficacy of the Divine presence is not confined to the soul, but that it reaches the body as well. "Nothing is more powerful for ordering, not only what is interior but what is exterior, than this thought : God is watching us. The servants of a prince may find some reasons for behaving themselves outwardly in a suitable way in hopes of a reward, or from fear of a punishment. But no motive is more powerful than the thought of the prince's presence who is watching them and considering them. Natural honesty, hatred of evil, and desire to edify his neighbour, may also suggest to a pious person motives for behaving himself with modesty.

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. ii.

But how much more powerful for him is the thought that he is in the presence of the Master Who sees all—that he is under the eye of Him Whom nothing escapes. Seneca invited his disciples, if they were desirous never to depart from the rule of modesty, to imagine that they had for a witness of their actions some revered man of great authority ; this fiction appeared to him sufficient to keep them straight. And how much more efficacious will this thought be, which is no longer a fiction but a reality, the thought that God is watching us, to create in our exterior behaviour a true modesty ?" [1]

In a few last words Alvarez de Paz summarizes all the advantages of recollection, and we feel that it is not only with his reason that he writes these pages, but with a heart overflowing with love to God, and with a piety which finds for itself moving and informing expression ; and his style, habitually so graceful and pure, assumes here a more perfect purity still, and rises to remarkable loftiness : " For the man anxious to reach perfection, let him take the remembrance of the presence of God as his principal instrument for attaining that end. For as the sun chases away all the darknesses of night, so the presence of God puts

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. iv.

to flight not only grave faults, but venial faults and slightest imperfections. It brings about, better even than would the presence of an earthly King, an admirable order, both in our interior thoughts and in our exterior behaviour. It makes us prompt and generous in everything which touches the service of God. It enables us (if we may use the expression) to experience God dwelling within us, and communicates to us sweetness and the taste for heavenly things. At times it stamps God so powerfully within us that it becomes difficult for us to lose the recollection of Him. It dominates man's whole nature, and hinders him from giving his attention even to things of grave import; then, when obedience, charity, or necessity so demand, it allows him to give his mind to whatever exterior work he may have to do without forgetting God. Once, long ago, God revealed Himself in a burning bush, and why? In order to deliver His people. Are you like that bush, all covered with thorns—*i.e.*, with imperfections? Then call to God by means of your thoughts and your desires, and the fire of His presence will consume all these imperfections. There is neither in the spiritual life nor in the path of virtue any difficulty which it is impossible for you to overcome if you know how to hold yourself in the

presence of God, and to pour out your heart before Him.

"To remove a fish from the water is to cause it to suffer; if you wish it to live you must return it again to its native element. A branch separated from the tree bears no fruit; graft it into the tree again and it will bear fruit. In the same manner our soul, when united to God in thought and love, is full of vitality, and bears the fruits of perfection; but should it be turned away from Him and given up to the love of creatures, it grows weak and remains sterile. Wax exposed to the sun's rays loses its yellow tinge and becomes white, and the longer it is so exposed the whiter it becomes. Thus it is with the soul which knows how to place itself by means of a continual act of remembrance under the action of God, the Sun of justice.

"If a prince asks you not to forget him all the time he is doing some good action for you, you will readily agree to the suggestion. Well! Is there a moment when God is not showering His benefits upon you, or communicating to you life, health, and motion; or when He is not lavishing upon you the graces which should make you both better and holier? Have you, then, ever the right to forget Him? If your reflection in a glass could reason, what

would it be doing and saying? It would never cease to watch you, knowing that if you turned your eyes away from it, it would immediately vanish. It would ceaselessly repeat the prophet's words: 'Look upon me, and have pity on me';[1] for my whole existence depends on your presence. But do you not depend still more on God, both as regards your natural and your supernatural existence? Do not cease, then, to look towards Him, and to pray Him not to turn away His eyes from you.

"The presence of God is sufficient to fill the soul with joy and jubilation. If, like a furious tempest, temptation should shake it; should pride assault it, or depression and discouragement ensue; or, fearing to become the plaything of Satan's many impulses, should it lose even the hope of salvation; so soon as the Divine light shines upon it and it recollects the presence of God, calmness revives and the hope of triumph is renewed."[2]

5. I think our readers will like to place side by side with that of Alvarez de Paz another description, also very remarkable, of the joys and graces which accompany the practice of recollection. We refer to some words of Courbon borrowed in their turn from a contemporary

[1] Ps. xxiv. 16. [2] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. v.

mystic writer whose name is not revealed: "What must be the satisfaction of souls who have once tasted the grace of recollection, and who possess God in the depths of their heart, thus ensuring His presence whensoever they please! When, by their faithfulness, they have acquired the holy habit of the presence of God, God's Spirit dwells in them in quite a special manner. He takes possession of all their powers; He becomes Master of their heart; He truly reigns there by means of that constant and loving presence. He subdues the flesh; teaches how to despise the world; destroys the power of the devil, and makes them to enjoy the real happiness of which we are capable on earth—viz., the power to rest in God as in the centre of our being.

"This loving presence of God brings with it all good things and banishes every evil thing; for how can it be possible to gaze continually on God and not to love Him? It is an almost ceaseless adoration and thanksgiving and blessing of God; and faults and sins both great and small must vanish in the light of that holy presence, which puts to flight both waste of mind and agitation of the passions, which are the common sources of our faults. There is no devotion which mortifies more and more continually the lust of concupiscence, and none which so weans us from

worldly conversation, frees the human will, and keeps it detached from all love. For he who really tries to see God in everything, and not only directs his intention towards Him, becomes accustomed to live only by Him and for Him. And as the turning the back on God is the source of all ill, and of all the confusion which exists in the world, so the ceaseless looking towards Him is a perpetual and familiar means for the attainment both of holiness and of perfection. I use the word 'familiar' because it is certain that he who strives faithfully to acquire this holy habit of the presence of God by frequently returning to His Divine Majesty, comes at length to consider Him so sweetly and with such ease, that the act ceases to be one of recollection only, and becomes as it were an instinct urging the soul onwards towards an accustomed exercise.

"From this it follows that the soul is able secretly to enjoy God everywhere, whoever may be its companions, and on every occasion, if it is wont to retire into itself, and only to give to exterior occupations that attention which it cannot refuse to them. Once this habit is formed in the soul, a sentiment arises within, at once sweet and imperceptible, of God present, which remains amidst the greatest troubles like a smouldering fire, and which, when we so desire,

we have only to blow up, so that it may burn more brightly, corresponding in intensity to the effort made to become recollected.

"A soul thus faithfully seeking God within, and making constant efforts to prevent itself from being entirely carried away by the torrent of business, will gladly interrupt its occupations in order to devote itself to God and to the recollection of His holy presence. Perfect love is fruitful in inventing excuses for stealing these sweet moments a thousand times a day, in spite of the most engrossing occupations. By so doing it is astonishing how many thoughts, how much idle curiosity, how many trifling affections and untimely recollections are suppressed which crowd continually through the senses into that soul which is not properly on its guard, darkening and embarrassing it till it hardly knows itself, much like a traveller overtaken by a storm of dust who can no longer see his way."[1]

6. We must beware of thinking that these exhortations to recollection apply only to persons vowed to contemplation. "This exercise," writes Père Lallemand, "is for all—regardless of age, or time, or place—both during our exterior occupations and in times of sickness;

[1] *Entret. Spirit.*, edit. Casterman, p. 124 *et seq.*

there is no occupation, however perplexing, which does not permit of our retiring from time to time into ourselves in order to become recollected."[1]

Practicable in every state of life, this exercise is, according to the same writer, especially necessary to such as are labouring for the salvation of their neighbour. "There is," he writes, "no danger so great as to neglect the care of our interior life, or to omit to interest ourselves in how we are progressing. Such negligence and ignorance give rise to an infinity of venial sins, which dispose us insensibly to some mortal sin or to great temptations, resulting in a fatal downfall. Such is often the result with those amongst us whose lives are entirely exterior and always spent in a turmoil, and who neglect the care of the interior life, under pretext of their ardour and their charity, because they are given up to the service of others. But even if they do not reach this extreme limit, it is certain that by throwing themselves into what is exterior and neglecting the order of the interior life while performing their duties, the grace and merit which they lose are infinite. *What they do bears very little fruit*, because it is lacking in that energy and vigour which comes from the interior

[1] 5e *Principe*, ch. iii., § 2.

mind, unaccompanied also by the blessings which God gives to persons of recollection and prayer. They do not do anything solely for God, self being at the root of everything they undertake, and even in the best they do, their own interest is secretly mingled with the glory of God.

"Life is thus passed under the alternate influence of nature and of grace, sometimes without making a single step towards perfection in ten or twenty years, the mind as absent, and the heart as hard, during all the exercises of Christian piety and of the religious life, as if not possessed of these aids at all."[1]

7. From a merely theoretical point of view, the frequent thought of God, or the habitual remembrance of His presence, might seem easy enough. Do we not find in this constant intercourse with God a satisfaction of what is one of the most pressing wants of our heart—one of the most imperious aspirations of our nature? Poetry has expressed under a thousand forms the disenchantment which the soul finds at the bottom of all earthly pleasures; and, echoing the poets, the philosophers proclaim that, hidden deep down in the soul, there is an impulse which, from objects imperfect and finite, causes

[1] 5e *Principe*, ch. iii., § 3.

it naturally to leap upwards to the perfect and infinite Being.

That this impulse exists, I do not deny. But that its working may always be easy, and its play always free, appears to me most debatable. It is only necessary to watch oneself for an hour, to look with a little care at the natural incline down which both our thoughts and our affections are sliding, to discover that both thoughts and affections tend to every direction except towards God, and that vigorous pressure alone is capable of putting them straight again, and inclining them towards Him. If recollection is so easy, how can we explain that so few persons practise it? The truth is that recollection meets with very serious obstacles, both within us and outside of us, and it only succeeds in becoming acclimatized in a soul after struggles often both long and painful. How can all the fantastic descriptions of our nature, or all the exaggerations of poetry, invalidate this experience?

Let us, then, not conceal from ourselves the fact that we have here an enterprise both difficult and long-winded. Illusion on this point would be fatal. It would hinder our turning to God as suppliants in order to cry to Him for help, and to ask Him Himself to create in us this recollection. Then it would beget discouragement in

souls who found that road, which they had been expecting to find broad and easy, blocked and bristling with difficulties. We must, then, look forward to more than one failure, and more than one fresh start, both painful and humiliating; and we shall have to go through many alternating victories and defeats before recollection becomes rooted in our soul. But if we hold out—if we really desire recollection, and if we never weary in our prayer to God for it, the way will seem easier every day, and every day we shall find ourselves to be nearer to God—more united to Him.

St. Teresa witnesses to the rapid progress made by those who confine themselves to this discipline: "Since nothing is won without trouble, in God's name, my daughters, do not grudge either the time or the application which you will devote to this matter. I can assure you that, with Our Lord's assistance, you will reach the goal *in a year, and perhaps in six months.* See how little the labour is in comparison with the profit reaped; you will be laying a solid foundation upon which the Divine Master may build in our soul what He pleases. If He intends to raise you to great things, He will find you rightly disposed for them by reason of your having kept so close to Him."[1]

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxx.

8. Let us count up the principal difficulties which we shall meet with in this enterprise. "The first," says Courbon, "is the bad habit we have since childhood of observing always things which are external to ourselves, and of seeking in creatures both our peace and our happiness. From this, then, comes the great difficulty which we find in becoming recollected, and in returning into ourselves when we have been just taught that the kingdom which we are seeking is within us, and that it is there that we must look for it. This habit which we have of living a life of continual waste can, short of a special miracle, only be destroyed little by little, for whoever would wish to bring this about suddenly, would run the risk of turning his own brain, or of losing courage, conceiving that it is impossible for him to reach this holy recollection."[1]

A second difficulty is, I find, mentioned by St. Teresa: it is the habit of multiplying vocal prayers. Souls condemn themselves, in fact, to the daily recitation of such long and such numerous prayers that their good will, however great it may be, gives way before the task, and soon it is only the lips which speak: the heart is far from God. Who will make those persons

[1] *Entret. Spirit.*, p. 222.

understand that a few minutes of true recollection would be infinitely more profitable to them than those interminable vocal prayers? If we tell them to lessen the number of those prayers in order to become more attentive to God's presence, we risk their being scandalized, for they look upon our counsel as nothing less than a robbing of God. Surely St. Teresa's words should reassure them. Anyhow, we take refuge behind her authority in the advice which we venture to give. Here are her words: "There are some persons, and I was of the number, whose heart God softens, whom He favours with holy inspirations, and whom He illuminates as regards the nothingness of the things of this world, and yet who remain deaf to His voice. Would you like to know the reason of this? It is because they lay too much stress upon saying, very hurriedly and as if to accomplish their task, a quantity of vocal prayers which they have resolved to recite each day. In vain does Our Lord offer to them His kingdom; they have no wish for it, thinking that it is preferable to recite their vocal prayers.

"In God's Name, my daughters, do not act thus. Consider what a very great treasure you would be losing through your own fault, and that it is of greater value to say, from time to

time, a few words of the *Pater*, than to say it many times in a hurry, and as if you were running. He to Whom you address your requests is quite close to you, and will not fail to listen to you. Believe me, such is the true way to praise and sanctify His Name, for in so doing you will glorify the Lord like children who are already in their Father's house ; you will do so with truer affection, and with a greater desire for His glory ; and, finally, with such real happiness that it will seem impossible for you ever to give up His service."[1]

A third reason why many fail in the practice of recollection—and in my judgment the most serious of all—is the lack of energy which we bring to the service of God, also the horror which we profess for all which can put a constraint upon, or thwart nature. The ideal for many people would be to taste the joys of recollection, but without its having cost them the least effort or the slightest sacrifice. It would, I know, be most pleasant if recollection —union with God—could originate in tepid souls by a simple act of the will, and it would be most comfortable for those souls to be able, at their pleasure, to return to their vanities and to their soft and sensual life, and come back to

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxxii.

God when their fancy moved them. This kind of twofold existence might not be displeasing to such as are attracted to the devotional life only on account of the joys which it brings to them, and who might consider themselves defrauded if they obtained spiritual happiness at the price of a little temporal enjoyment. Such soft and sensual souls—souls possessed of little delicacy in their relations with God—cannot be told too often that in wishing to make one and the same soul the home both of recollection and tepidity, they are engaged in the pursuit of a visionary enterprise; no two things are more utterly opposed, more incapable of dwelling together under the same roof.

We may, I think, affirm that progress in recollection is proportionate to the generosity with which all the other fruits of the interior life are cultivated; it results from this that recollection is, as compared with perfection, at once cause and effect. That it is a powerful means by which a soul may reach perfection is a first proposition which cannot be disputed. On the other hand, it can only operate in that soul which is already initiated into the interior life; and the perfecting of this habit becomes easier for it as its own life becomes more complete. This is a second proposition not less evident than the former.

How often does it happen to a confessor, who is exhorting a soul to live the life of recollection, to receive this answer: "I wish I could; I have tried more than once and I have always failed." The experience is not conclusive; it has not been made under the conditions which alone could have insured success. For such to have been decisive, it would have been necessary for the soul to have persevered not only in the practice of recollection, but to have persevered according to its strength in the practice of Christian perfection; it should have striven energetically for the reformation of its own interior life, first by the suppression of venial sin, then by sacrifice generally accepted or sought after. If, after doing all this, it still found a recollected life impossible, its excuse would be admitted. But so long as it refuses to throw off tepidity, it has no one but itself to blame for its want of success. We make so bold to promise that things will look quite altered as soon as it seriously undertakes self-reformation; recollection will spring up of itself and will develop like some splendid vegetation flourishing in a well-prepared soil. "God," says Père Grou, "calls all men to recollection, since it is beyond a doubt for all Christians that Jesus Christ said that we must pray always; and it is

certain that all would reach this state, if they would correspond faithfully with the attraction of grace. Let the love of God be truly predominant in a heart; let it become in some manner natural to it; let the soul apply itself continually to increase its love by trying to please God in all things, and by refusing Him nothing which He asks; let it take everything that happens as coming from His hand; let it resolutely determine never to commit any fault designedly and knowingly; but should it have the misfortune to commit one, to humble itself for it, and recover from it, it will have reached the practice of continual prayer. This prayer will continue amidst our occupations, our conversation, and our amusements, when the same are innocent. The thing is not impracticable, nor as difficult as one might imagine. This state does not imply a continual thinking of God, but that we should never allow the mind to dwell on useless thoughts, still less on bad ones. It does not imply a ceaseless making of acts, or saying of prayers; but that the heart is always turned towards God, always attentive to God, always ready to do His holy will.

"This continual prayer which some confound with the practice of recollection does not in itself differ from it," continues Père Grou; "neverthe-

less, it is very rare, because there are few hearts rightly disposed for it, and sufficiently courageous and faithful to persevere in it. The soul only enters on it from the moment when it has wholly given itself to God. Now there are very few souls who give themselves to God without reserve; when making this gift self-love nearly always keeps something back, as the sequel soon shows. But when the gift is complete, God rewards it at once with that of Himself; He takes up His abode in the heart, and fashions there that continual prayer which consists in recollection, in attentiveness to God dwelling within us in the midst of ordinary occupations."[1]

Article II.—On the Diverse Forms of Recollection

1. Recollection does not take the same form in all persons. There are diverse methods of recollection corresponding to the dispositions of particular souls, and to the differing eminences of the spiritual life; but this diversity of forms in no way suggests that any one method is opposed to any other, and, as Courbon remarks,[2] these different modes of recollection have so

[1] *Manuel des âmes intér.*: "De la Prière Continuelle."
[2] *Entr. spirit.*, p. 195.

much in common, that it often happens that persons practise them all without any difficulty. Each is at liberty to choose among the methods we are about to expound, that one which is most in harmony with his turn of mind, and which fits in best with the manner in which, at the present moment, he is accustomed to call upon God. I have said at the present time, because, in our dealings with God, we are not glued to one spot: progress, rather, a constant moving forward, is the law of our spiritual life. It may happen, then, that the form our recollection took, excellent for us in itself, a few weeks ago, should cease to be helpful for us, may even have become impossible. And why? Because the soul has progressed, and because the new state into which it has entered implies new wants, and admits of different aspirations. To persist, then, in the practice of recollection under its old form would be at least to risk the waste of time; the moment has come to try another method.

These differing forms may be grouped together under three heads: "The first," says Alvarez de Paz,[1] "consists in calling to mind everywhere, and in all our acts, Christ, our Saviour, *present at our side under some sensible form.* This possi-

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. viii.

bility of everywhere contemplating our God as visible and like ourselves is one of the multiple advantages of the Incarnation.

"It is true that His holy human nature is now in Heaven, and that it does not now dwell everywhere on the earth, except, of course, in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Nevertheless, wherever we are, it is permissible for us for the greater good of our souls to think of that Sacred Humanity as if it were present with us; and as Jesus Christ in His God-head never ceases to be present to us, we do well likewise to keep before us the thought of His human nature. In his Canticle, Zacharias, father of St. John, said that Christ came into the world, 'that being delivered from the fear of our enemies, we may serve Him *by walking in His presence* in holiness and justice all the days of our life.' This God has presented Himself before our eyes to the intent that we may more easily contemplate Him, whatever we may be doing: He has willed, in fact, that the bodily side of our nature should also have its part to play in the work of our perfection.

"Regarding this form of the Divine presence we have a few remarks to make. Firstly, in fixing the mind on Jesus Christ, it is best to take that one amongst the mysteries which pleases you most, and which will be most useful

to your soul—which fits in best with the state you are in at the moment. But at first on being converted to the things of God, it is the image of Jesus crucified which you must strive to bear within you.

"Then, when you see Christ quite close to you, beware of allowing the mind to dwell solely on the Humanity, but gaze on Him as He really is —*i.e.*, the Man-God, and accustom yourself to move little by little from His Humanity to His Divinity. When you are in the company of any friend whom you love either on account of his goodness or his intelligence, I do not know how you would get into contact with him except through his body, in order to penetrate to the soul which resides in that body as in its tabernacle; and you love to hear that soul speak, using the bodily voice as its instrument, and you love to speak to it. So in contemplating Jesus Christ, look on the Word, the Son of God hidden in Him, and fix the eye of your faith on this Word. Thus will you fulfil the apostolic command: 'And if we have known Christ according to the flesh, but now we know Him so no longer.'[1] This will also be an excellent means for you to prepare yourself for contemplation which has the Divinity for its chief object.

[1] 2 Cor. v. 16.

"But as I have said before, this object can only be attained by degrees, and for this attainment, you must count more on prayer than upon injudicious effort. It is, then, useless to conjure up any image or likeness of Our Lord's face, or of any of His features; think only that you are in the presence of God, without expending further mental effort, and fasten your gaze respectfully on Him. To seek a too exact representation of His human form or features would be fatigue to the head, there would also be the danger of illusion; besides which we might hinder love itself by over-preoccupation with the sense of sight.

"It will not be sufficient to think of Jesus Christ as at your side, and to fix your attention on the picture you form to yourself of Him; it is also necessary to imagine that His eyes are fastened on you. You will remember that He is witness of your every action and thought, and that nothing escapes Him. This will be the means for you not only to avoid the least faults, but to please God in every word which your lips pronounce and in every thought which issues from your heart.

"I will conclude with a remark which applies to all the various modes of God's presence: to the recollection of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, we

must join the aspirations, the affections of the will. In prayer it is the affections which play the principal part ; it is the same with the practice of the presence of God. And the affections should vary according to the different dispositions of the soul. There are some which are good in times of temptation, and others during hours of peace. Some, again, are suitable for times of consolation ; others in times of desolation."

2. St. Teresa has repeatedly described this form of recollection in pages from which we should regret not to have quoted here, and in which we shall meet again the doctrine of Alvarez de Paz, but under a form less didactic and more familiar. In the twenty-third chapter of her Life, she exhorts us to picture Jesus Christ to ourselves in one of the mysteries of His Passion, and to nourish our minds and hearts with that remembrance : " Suppose," she says, " that you are contemplating Jesus Christ fastened to the column : it will be well to consider Who it is Who suffers, the greatness and the causes of His suffering, and lastly the love with which He endures. But it is not right to fatigue the mind with trying to fathom these different points ; it is well to rest peacefully beside the Divine Master without reasoning. The soul

will occupy itself quietly with the consideration that He is contemplating it; it will keep Him company, will speak to Him and address its requests to Him ; it will humble itself in His presence while enjoying the delights which He bestows on it, realizing always that it is unworthy thus to enjoy His Divine presence. If it is able even to begin its prayer with this, it will draw to itself great store of blessing."

In another of her works the Saint has developed this subject very much more fully. The charm of her description is my excuse for the length of the quotation : " Since in prayer you are alone, try, my daughters, to find a companion. But what companion can you find preferable to our Divine Master ? Picture to yourself that adorable Saviour as beside you, and consider with what love and what humility He condescends to instruct you. Believe me, remain as much as you can in the company of so excellent a Friend. If you become accustomed to keep yourself in His presence, and if He sees that in so doing you have only a continual desire to please Him, you will never be able to alienate Him from yourself for a single second.

" O my sisters! you who are unable to discourse much with the understanding, or to occupy yourself with any subject without being

troubled by tiresome distractions, make, I beseech you, this salutary habit your own. I know that you can do so ; I know it because of my own experience ; because, for many years, I have groaned at never being able to keep my mind fixed on any truth during my prayer. That this affliction is very great, I admit ; but if, in all humility, we ask Our Lord to remove it, believe that He will do so ; He will not, of His infinite goodness, be able to make up His mind to leave us thus alone, and He will keep us company. If we cannot attain to this happiness in one year, let us work for many years, and never grudge the time so well employed.

" Nevertheless, do not think that I am asking of you long meditations on this Divine Saviour, nor much reasoning, nor great and sublime considerations ; just allow your gaze to rest upon Him. If you cannot do more, then for a few moments at least keep the eye of your soul fastened on this adorable Spouse. What can hinder you ? Why ! when you so wish it, your gaze is arrested even by objects ill-favoured, and can you not keep it fixed on that which is the fulness of all conceivable beauty ?

" That adorable Master, on His part, subjects Himself to your desires, and adapts Himself to the varied movements of your soul. Is the hour

one of gladness for you? Consider Him, then, in His Resurrection. The sight only of Him as He comes forth from the sepulchre will cause you to leap for joy. What resplendency! What beauty! What majesty! How keenly the sense of victory shines in his glance! How His heart beats with joy as He contemplates the field of battle, where He has won so great a victory, and where He has conquered the immortal kingdom which He desires to share with you.

"Is it the hour of tribulation or of sadness for you? Then follow Him to the Garden of Gethsemani; try and realize into what an ocean of affliction His soul must be plunged, for He allows no sign to escape Him of the grief He suffers, no word of complaint. He is not only patient, but patience itself. Or, again, consider Him fastened to the pillar—become the Man of Sorrows—all His flesh torn to shreds, and enduring this punishment for the excessive love which He bears to you; persecuted by some, spat upon by others, forsaken and abandoned by His friends, no one to stand up for Him; perished with cold, and so entirely alone that you will be able, by yourself and without any witnesses, to approach Him, and He will permit you in your sorrow to console Him in His. Or, once

again, think of your adorable Saviour bearing His Cross, mounting the hill of Calvary, while His executioners urge Him breathlessly forward, He will turn towards you, His eyes filled with tears, and in that glance what heavenly beauty! What tender compassion! That adorable Master will forget His own grief in order that He may assuage yours, and that solely because you come to Him for consolation, and turn aside to gaze on Him.

"Does your heart melt at the sight of the Divine Spouse of your soul in so sad a plight? And not content merely to gaze at Him, do you feel yourself constrained to hold converse with Him in your soul? Then do so: but see that you use no formal language. Speak to Him quite simply, and straight from your heart—such words will have far greater value in His eyes. 'O Saviour of the world and true Spouse of my soul!' you may say to Him, 'How can I see Thee reduced to such an extremity? O my Saviour and my God! can it be that Thou dost not disdain the companionship of so poor a soul as I, or that Thou dost permit me to bring Thee consolation; for I fancy I see in Thy countenance that Thou art comforted by seeing me near Thee,' etc.

"A sure aid to the realization of Our Lord's

presence is having near you some such representation of that adorable Master as you most fancy; do not be content to wear it without ever looking at it, but place it somewhere where your eyes may constantly rest on it, so that it may often move you to converse with your Spouse. And doubt not that He Himself will put into your hearts words which you may speak to Him. You never feel any hesitation in speaking to His creatures, then why should words fail you when in converse with your God? Never fear that such a thing should happen. In fact, I know of myself that such a thing will never be, if you learn the habit of colloquy with Our Lord. If you have not this habit, the failure to find words would not be surprising; for if one only has little connection with a person, it results that one is not at one's ease with him, and one does not know what to say to him. Under such conditions even near relations would come to be to us like strangers, and unknown.

"I can further assure you," concludes St. Teresa, "that if you accustom yourself to the careful practice of what I have here recommended to you, that which you gain from it will be such that no words can express it. Keep yourself, then, constantly by the side of

your Divine Master, with an ardent desire to learn that which He has to teach you, and in a short time He will know how to make of you a disciple worthy of Himself."[1]

I wish to draw your attention to the simplicity of the language which St. Teresa here recommends. It is only necessary to re-read the words which she puts into the mouth, or rather into the heart, of him who speaks to Our Lord, to realize that what she suggests is within the reach of the simplest souls—souls who have no claim to be ranked in that class to whom the ambitious term "intellectual" is in our day applied. In this grand simplicity what a lesson she reads to those who imagine that in addressing God it is only proper to approach Him with a well-turned phrase and in a careful style! True love, whether between man and God, or only between man and man, is sober in its language, and disdainful of literary effort.

It is not without interest to compare the method inculcated by St. Teresa with that attributed by Père de Caussade to the mystic who wrote in the eighteenth century under the name of *Villageois*. Without other learning, and with no other knowledge than that of Jesus Christ crucified, as he himself admits in his book, this

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxvii.

man, by the express command of his directors, wrote pages, illuminating with all the authority of experience the most exalted problems of mysticism. For the benefit of our readers we will here make a few quotations from this book, which, to our mind, contains an excellent method of recollection. Those who say that they are incapable of becoming recollected are specially exhorted to impress on their minds the simple structure of this method; and if they will only make the effort required, we can promise them that they will reap from it substantial benefits. "The only instruction I ever had," he writes, "was given me by a good priest when I was young: 'My son, when you wish to pray, you have only to picture to yourself Jesus Christ, both God and Man, in that one of the mysteries of His life to which you are most drawn; while thus simply engaged, *you will say and do mentally, and with great simplicity*, all that you would have said and done if you had seen with your eyes the holy Humanity as you had pictured it to yourself.' Adding: 'And I know many persons to whom I have never given any further instruction, and whom I know to have reached a higher degree of prayer than I myself.'"

3. We have seen how Alvarez de Paz warns

us not to contemplate the Sacred Humanity of Our Saviour in too precise a manner, but rather to pass on to the divinity of which the human nature is the veil. The warning was, perhaps, superfluous; the mind moving on often unconsciously, but of necessity, to the divinity: in fact, it is impossible to contemplate the humanity of the Saviour without thinking at the same time of His divinity. How otherwise can we explain the attraction by which we are drawn to meditate on the mysteries of the life of Jesus, the charm which we feel in all His actions and in His least words? It is because He is God that both our eyes and our hearts are so captivated: God Who we realize is speaking to us through His human nature and so attracting us. Besides, who is there with an imagination so singular as to differentiate, by a process of abstraction, between the human nature of the Saviour and His Divine nature, in order to concentrate his homage and his worship on the former of these two natures? When we endeavour to live in the blessed companionship of Jesus, it is the entire Jesus Whom we associate with our life; and we worship the Divine nature as well as the human nature. This observation will not be without its use, perhaps, in order to dissipate the scruples of certain souls who, through interpreting the

teaching of Alvarez de Paz too literally, fancy that it is not possible to dwell upon the humanity of the Saviour without imperfection—without a kind of spiritual sensuality. St. Teresa has protested against this prejudice in more than one place—a prejudice so prevalent in her day—and urges her religious to yield to their attraction towards the Sacred Humanity without reserve or scruple; in her opinion it is merely necessary to stipulate that their thoughts and affections should pass on to the Godhead hidden beneath the human exterior.

A mystic whose words Courbon quotes, but whose name he has thought it proper not to give, teaches, as the result of his own experience, that nothing so aids the soul in coming directly and speedily to God as the frequent remembrance of the humanity of Jesus Christ: "The sight of that Sacred Humanity," he writes, "enables me to rise quietly to the divinity; and as I am filled with wonder at God made Man, my wonder carries me on to that incomprehensible divinity to which alone worship is due. I also think that as Jesus Christ came into this world only to teach us to know God, the thought of Jesus Christ brings with it the grace of putting us directly into the presence of God, and by this He works in us to produce perfect gratitude

towards His Father. And as His Father has drawn us to Himself, as the Gospel says: *No one can come to me, unless my Father draw him;* He restores us to the bosom of the Father by the power which has been given to Him, and, as soon as we have grasped His humanity mentally, the thought of that humanity raises us to the divinity. The Saviour of the world is a magnet —all needles magnetized by it turn unerringly towards that pole—by which I mean that every soul impregnated with His virtue turns towards God."[1]

4. It comes to this, then, that to live with Jesus at our side watching us is what constitutes the particular form of recollection which we have so far had in view. There is a different form of this method which we should be sorry to pass over in silence, and which would certainly be more suitable to some souls—viz., the consideration of Jesus not so much at our side as within us. It seems to me that this gaze fixed on Jesus present within the very centre of our soul must make recollection both easier and more profound. It seems to me that as our souls are then in closer contact with the Saviour's heart, they would continue more united.

St. Teresa assures her nuns that this glance

[1] *Entr. spirit.*, p. 208.

of the mind inwards will enable them to find Jesus: "You will perhaps tell me," she writes, "that if you had been able to see Our Lord with your bodily eyes while He was yet alive, you would never have taken those eyes off Him. Do not believe, I pray you, any such thing. Those who will not now make a little effort at recollection *or seek for Him by the inward glance*, would never have had the courage to remain with Magdalen at the foot of the cross.

"It is a good thing," continues St. Teresa, "for those who live habitually in a state of recollection, to learn to think of Our Lord as within the very centre of their soul; it is more attractive and beneficial than the consideration of Him as merely by our side. This I have said before, and it is in accord with the manuals of prayer which treat of this manner of seeking God. Particularly is this true of the glorious St. Augustine, who sets forth how he sought God in the public squares, at entertainments, and, in fact, everywhere in the world, but never found Him anywhere as he found Him in his own heart. The advantage of a like method is obvious, for it enables us to find God within ourselves without any necessity so much as to raise the thoughts to Heaven; we are thus spared

an effort which fatigues the mind, disturbs the soul, and lessens the benefits we should reap."[1]

It is not necessary to dwell at greater length on this last variety of recollection, besides which it has much in common with the third method, which will be described later on. If we enter now into practical details, they would only have to be repeated when the third method is described.

5. "The second manner of recollection," says Alvarez de Paz, "is more advanced. It is no longer the humanity of Christ, but God Himself, Whom, with the eye of faith, we see beside us. This manner of recollection is more exalted because it is more spiritual; and because it rests no more upon a pious imagination, but upon a very sure reality. Our faith teaches us, indeed, that the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord is not everywhere present, though it is, of course, allowable for us to imagine it as being so, and such an effort of the imagination, far from being useless to us, is, indeed, very religious; for, as experience teaches, this thought influences most happily our life's bearings. But though the human nature of the Word is not everywhere present, nevertheless the Person of the Word is so. Nothing, then, hinders us from thinking

[1] *Life of St Teresa*, ch. xl.

of that Person of the Word, and, by an effort of the imagination, of considering Him as clothed with the humanity which is His in Heaven and in the Sacrament of the altar. When, on the other hand, we see God present in his divinity, what we picture to ourselves is absolutely true, and we do homage to a very certain and a very manifest truth. 'I fill the heavens and the earth,' God Himself says; that pure and indivisible substance is everywhere present and pervades all things. Angels and souls and glorified bodies can penetrate the hardest stone; surely, then, God the Creator of the universe would not exist in a less close relation to all the objects which owe to Him their existence, and which would return to nothingness if He ceased continually to preserve and uphold them."[1]

The same writer points out certain practical means which should facilitate for us this realization of God as present everywhere: "Let the soul," he writes, "think of itself as the central point of a sphere which is God; the eye which sees God is at the centre of this sphere, and the rays of light which pass towards the circumference extend *ad infinitum*. Let it, then, consider itself as an atom bathed in a light which fills all things, and which it meets with every-

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. ix.

where ; or again, as a sponge plunged in the ocean, and penetrated with the water of that ocean. Accustom yourself to see God hidden in everything, disclosing Himself through the perfection of creatures ; think more of Him Who inhabits the house, than of the house itself, and love rather to contemplate that most pure spirit than the body which it animates. If at any time a thought obtains entrance into the mind, in itself frivolous or implying some imperfection, beware of imitating our first parents who wished to flee from God's sight : for, of however trifling a nature, no action can escape His notice. Take, rather, holy Job for your pattern, who teaches that God watches narrowly all the ways of man, and counts all his steps."

6. This method may be practised for some time by a soul without her rising to the third form of recollection which we shall now set forth, and at greater length. Since God is present in everything He is present in our soul. Why, then, should we search for Him outside of ourselves ? The second method of recollection leads, then, quite spontaneously to the third : or to speak more correctly, and to keep the truths of psychology more in view, we should say that the two methods can very well operate in the same soul, and that the recollection of that

soul may have for its foundation, at one time the general truth that God is present in everything, at another the more circumstantial truth that He is present in us.

When practising this third and more perfect method of recollection, we no longer perceive God as outside of us, but as being in the secret place of our hearts, in the very centre of our souls: "If this method of practising recollection is agreeable to you," says Alvarez de Paz, "accustom yourself to rise above all created things to rest only in yourself, to build there a temple in the very centre of your heart, and to contemplate God present in this temple, whence He may guide, lead, guard and sustain you. And there, without disturbance from anything exterior, or any image perceptible to the senses, you can take up a position at the feet of the Master, you can listen to Him with respect, speak to Him with humility, you can love Him ardently, you may hold familiar intercourse with Him, turning to Him through all the passing events of life, whether in joy or in sorrow, as a son to his father, or a wife to her husband." [1]

It was thus that St. Catherine of Siena found within herself a sanctuary where she could rest

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. x.

and adore God at will, although she found it impossible to isolate herself from creatures, being obliged by her parents to pursue an exterior calling. "Without ever being cast down by this opposition," writes her biographer, "she was obedient to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and constructed within herself an oratory, as it were, a secret cell, from which nothing could drive her. In this cell, she made her permanent dwelling; later on, when she saw her confessor, Raymond de Pennafort, being crushed by the weight of exterior affairs, she advised him also to make for himself a retreat in his heart, and never leave it. It is in this retreat that He dwells Who said, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hear My voice and open the door I will come in and sup with him.' In full enjoyment of so sweet a host, and leaning on Him, the holy virgin of God was able to triumph over the devil and all his snares."[1]

The heathen philosophers had a presentiment of this truth. First, let us hear what Seneca says: "It is not necessary for us to raise our hands to Heaven, nor, in order to assure ourselves of being heard the better, need we ask permission of the temple guardian to reach God's ear. God is near thee; He is with thee, He is in thee.

[1] Surin's *Life of St. Catherine of Siena.*

I declare to thee, Lucilius, that there is in us a divinity who is witness both of our good and of our bad actions. He acts towards us as we ourselves act towards Him. No good man is deprived of the companionship of God." [1]

7. Many ascetic writers justify the recollection which now has our attention by that scholastic formula that "God exists in all things by presence, by power, and by essence." St. Teresa herself repeats that formula frequently; and taking, probably, her nun's theological learning for granted, she merely states it as an axiom which everybody should understand, and which requires no explanation. I am sure, however, that more than one among our readers would hesitate in the presence of that formula, and would be grateful for a precise definition thereof. We may be permitted, with the aid of theology, to supply what is lacking in that statement, which though most exact in itself, is unintelligible to those who are but little acquainted with the language of the Schoolmen.

Each of these words represents a manner of the presence of God. Each is, as it were, a different aspect of the doctrine of the immensity of God; or, rather, each interprets after his own manner the dogma of the Divine immensity in

[1] Book v., Epistle 4.

respect of the relationship which the creature bears to that immensity. Firstly, we must apprehend God as embracing all things by His presence—enveloping all things, and assigning to each that position which it should occupy in respect to Himself. We must apprehend God as having no limit. Now, if He did not thus encompass everything, if there was any single thing which escaped outside from His presence, God would no longer be without limit. He would be bounded by that thing which was outside Him. God cannot, then, be thought of as a being with a circumscribed existence, and subject to limitations of place; but as filling everything and being circumscribed by none. When it is said that God is in us *by presence*, it means that we are perpetually under the Divine gaze in whatsoever place we may be. It means to say that, God being everywhere and at every point in space, we are ceaselessly in His presence, and that He witnesses every act we perform, as well the most material as the most spiritual. "God sees me, and He sees into the very secret place of my soul," thus may we translate into ordinary language this first relationship of the creature to the Divine immensity.

St. Teresa makes use of a very fine simile to explain this first theological truth: "The

Divinity," she writes, "is like a diamond of purest water, and much greater than the world. Our every action is reflected in this diamond, because nothing could exist outside the limits of anything so vast as to comprehend everything within itself. It was to me the height of astonishment to see so many things reflected in this wonderful diamond in so short a space of time, and I could not look back without extremest sorrow upon the horrible stains which my sins left in that light of unspeakable purity. Oh, what would I not give to be able to communicate such insight to those who are living in shameful and infamous sin, so that they might realize that their crimes are not hidden, and that God is justly wounded by them, since they are committed under his very eyes, and after a manner so insulting to His great Majesty! I saw how just it was that for one mortal sin we should deserve hell, so gigantic and incomprehensible is the outrage to God by its commission in His presence, and how great is the repulsion of the infinite holiness towards such acts."[1]

But is God an inactive witness of our actions? Does He restrict Himself to ascertaining and recording what we do? On the contrary, He

[1] *Interior Castle*, First Dwelling.

co-operates with us at every moment of our existence. He preserves for us the life which He has given to us; and this preservation implies a continuous activity of God towards us. Then, He acts in concert with us, being the cause of everything that we do; no one can be independent of Divine grace; each one of our actions is given us from God, and does not come directly from us. The Divine power is present, then, in our being from the first moment of our creation to the last act of our life; it is present, then, through a co-operation both indispensable and unceasing. This is the second manner of the Divine presence—the presence *by power*.

From this continuous activity on God's part towards us arises another manner of presence, His presence *by essence*. "In reality," says St. Thomas, "there is no difference in God between what He is and what He does; the only distinction in this case is one of the intellect. Since the Divine activity is nothing else than the Divine essence, it follows that where God is present in action, there He is also present in essence."[1]

God does not operate in each one of His creatures from a distance; He is present in each one essentially—substantially.

[1] *Sent.*, Lib. i., dist. xxxvii., quæst. i.

From these principles it follows that God is omnipresent by essence. Seeing, therefore, that his upholding power reaches out to every living being, and that it is inseparable from His essence, it follows that the Divine essence is equally present to all His creatures.

But does God indwell each being in the same manner—viz., *by presence and by power?* No, God's power may act towards certain beings in a quite special manner, His gaze resting on them and enveloping them with very different sentiments. For example, He dwells in the regenerate soul in a manner quite different to that in which He dwells in a soul devoid of grace. Different, also, are the sentiments which His look betrays when it rests on each of these souls. In the former case He pours in a continuous stream those gifts which He withholds entirely from the latter—gifts which raise the regenerate soul to a participation in the Divine life, enabling it to become His adopted child. Then this regenerate soul lives in God's sight as an object of complacency; God looks on it with the love which a father bears to his child. The soul, on its part, remains close to God with the confidence and affection of a daughter, thereby forging a link between them which is of the nature of true friendship. How different is the manner in

which God works in such a soul from that in which He works in those which are not sanctified! How great the distance between such supernatural friendship and the simple relations which unite the non-regenerate soul to God!

It may appear to some persons that the above principles are somewhat abstract, but the determining factor in attempting this exposition has certainly not been any desire on our part to intrude unduly on the domain of scholastic philosophy. Our only motive has been the conviction that, though the form may be rather crude and out of harmony with our ordinary manner of speech, there lurk behind this truth some precious lessons, and that it alone contains what may be called the scientific theory of recollection. I readily allow that the science we have in view is not an explicit science, or one to which expression in the technical terms common to the Schoolmen is necessary. A poor and very simple religious, quite ignorant of all philosophical speculation, may know that God dwells in her, that the presence of God envelops her, and that she bears that presence about with her in the very centre of her being; all this she may know better than the most learned theologian, for the eye of simple faith can make up

the deficiency of that reason. That is most true. We have here one of those cases in which a person's knowledge may be true and profound, because practical, and yet be wanting in clear terms to express itself.

Now, is this a sufficient reason for neglecting such knowledge — one, moreover, which it is possible to acquire, and which speaks a language both clear and precise? Have we the right, under plea of humility or simplicity, to refuse instruction in that which will enable us to see things after a more luminous fashion? To take a detailed instance: Can we imagine for a moment that the humble religious of whom we spoke just now will lose anything by learning how to express accurately in words the truths regarding the Divine Presence which she realizes vividly, but has so far been unable to describe to others, or even to express to herself except in the haziest manner? Are we to fear that our hearts' sentiments will cease to be real if we become able to form a clear conception in our minds of what they are? How St. Teresa would have smiled at such a fear—she, who for so long a time realized the truth of God's presence within her without being able to find words to interpret it, and who expressed so much gratitude to the religious who was first

to supply the precise terminology of each of her impressions, declaring to her that she was not the plaything of an illusion, and explaining to her that God indwells everything *by presence, by power, and by essence.* There is not much appearance of knowledge having destroyed feeling in her, but rather of it having brought more liveliness to her impressions. It is certain that after this religious had given her the lesson in philosophy, her recollection became more profound, and the purification in her both of memory and imagination more complete and more ready.

Everyone knows at least the title of St. Teresa's work, *The Interior Castle.* This book is the working out of an allegory, and would be entirely trivial were it not based on the theological truth which we have just explained. In it the Saint compares the soul to a castle containing very many chambers all surrounding a central point, at which God dwells. That God makes the centre of the soul His dwelling-place is not a vain imagination, the outcome of a mind overheated by exaggerated mysticism: it is, as we have seen, a reality—in fact, one of the verities of faith. Such a conception of the relations of God and the soul is not all allegory, for when St. Teresa speaks of God dwelling in us she bases her teaching on a

theological foundation which is indisputable. In fact, it was not she who was first to teach it, for it is public property; it forms part of revealed truth.

What is original in St. Teresa is the manner in which the reciprocal situations of God and the soul are conceived by her, in which she likens the latter to a magnificent castle, whose apartments appear more sumptuous the nearer they approach to the central chamber in which God dwells, and from which He irradiates the entire castle with a light which becomes brighter in proportion as the partitions through which it has to filter, and which attenuate its radiancy, become thinner, and less remote from Him. The Saint warns us that we must not think of this castle as a series of chambers built one behind the other, and forming a suite of different rooms; but as composed of apartments arranged in concentric lines round a central point, as one sees the layers of wood radiating at different distances from the centre of a tree's trunk when cut through by a saw. This presence of God at the soul's centre communicates to it a wondrous beauty, which far surpasses anything we are accustomed to admire in this world, even when the degree of sanctifying grace is only of quite an ordinary kind.

"Try and realize," says St. Teresa, "that there is in each of us a magnificent palace all built of gold and precious stones, worthy, in a word, of the great King who dwells there; and, what is true, try and realize that you are contributing towards this splendour. This palace is your own soul; when it is pure, no palace on earth can rival its magnificence. The virtues are the diamonds with which it is decked, and the greater those virtues are, the more dazzling is the sparkle of those diamonds. And, finally, try and remember that in this palace dwells the King of Kings, Who, of His infinite goodness, desires to be a Father to you; that He is seated on a throne of very great price, and that this throne is your heart.

"There may be some, perhaps, who will laugh at me, and will say that all this is common knowledge, and they will be right; but it is not the less true that it was some time before it became clear to me. I knew very well that I had a soul, but, alas! having blinded my own eyes by clinging to the vanities of life, I failed to comprehend either the dignity of that soul, or the honour which God bestowed upon it by coming to dwell in the centre thereof. For if I had known then what I know now—viz., that so great a King dwelt in the little palace of my

soul—I should not so often have left Him quite alone ; sometimes, at least, I should have kept Him company, and have taken more pains to keep my soul free from the imperfections which defiled it.

"I will only add that he who desires to acquire this habit (for it is one which depends on ourselves) should never tire in his efforts gradually to obtain the mastery over himself by withdrawing his senses into himself. Instead of losing anything, he will gain much thereby for his soul—viz., the power of restraining the outward use of the senses, and of enlisting their services in aid of his own interior recollection. In conversation, let him remember that there is, at the bottom of his heart, someone to whom he can speak ; when listening, let him not forget that he should listen inwardly to Him who speaks most closely to him. And finally, let him consider that, if he so will, he need never more be separated from that Divine Companion; and that, if it should come to pass, that he should leave that heavenly Father for any long time alone, Whose succour he so needs, he should endeavour to feel real sorrow for having done so."[1]

8. It may happen—alas, it too often happens

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxx.

—that the soul, far from living in the whole castle, ceases to live in any of the apartments at all. "There are very many souls," says St. Teresa, "who live no nearer than the precincts —viz., where the guards live who defend the castle ; they never take the trouble to penetrate into the interior : they know neither the beautiful things which it contains, Who it is who dwells there, nor even how many chambers there are in it. When reading various books on prayer, you have no doubt noticed how often the soul is recommended to retire into itself—well, that is just what I mean by my illustration of its entry into the castle." [1]

Everybody knows the value of that expression : *To retire into oneself.* What it means is equally well known. It denotes the effort made by the soul to free itself from the exterior objects on which it has hitherto dissipated its powers, in order to concentrate them on itself. This implies, of course, that the soul does not always dwell at home, and that often it is entirely away. St. Teresa is quite right, then, in saying that the soul not only does not always make its home in all the mansions of the castle, but that sometimes it does not dwell in any single one of them. Too great, alas, is the number of those

[1] *Interior Castle*, First Mansion, ch. i.

who, according to her expression, dwell only in the precincts of the castle, and never penetrate into the interior.

Such souls, it is true, are in a state of grace; but being in a state of grace does not by itself insure access to the interior chambers; it is through prayer that the doors are opened. These souls pray, indeed, but more with the lips than with the heart. From time to time a vague and fugitive remembrance of God comes to mind: they even keep certain days as given specially to prayer; but they cannot free themselves from a thousand external affairs which absorb their minds and keep them riveted to earth: and where the treasure is, there the heart will follow. The treasure of such souls is in this world, and in this world they dwell; and unless they make some strong effort to shake themselves free, using even violence if necessary, St. Teresa tells them that they will never be other than permanent exiles from the castle, that they will never dwell at home.

9. The concrete and living form which recollection should generally take—and this is especially the case with the aspect of recollection which we have under consideration—is that of discourse with God. Now when in company, conversation is not on one side only. To know

how to talk and how to listen are two equally important rules of social intercourse. Well, does it not too often happen in our discourse with God that we forget one of those rules? And which? Certainly not that one which authorizes us to speak: we certainly speak enough—often too much. But do we listen sufficiently to God when He speaks? Do we not drown His voice by indiscreet interruptions, and by the fluency of our own words, which absorb our attention to such an extent as to make us deaf to the Divine voice? And is not this deafness often chronic with us? Have we, I wonder, any suspicion that God speaks to the soul in a language peculiarly His own? "Because His manner of speaking to us," says Courbon, "is wholly spiritual and interior, and indeed without any sound, it is only the faithful listeners who have the joy of hearing that Divine voice, although He speaks to all, and often He stands knocking at our heart's door."[1] "Do you think," said St. Teresa, "that God remains dumb when we speak to Him, even though we do not hear Him? Certainly not, but it is to our heart that He speaks every time we speak to Him from the heart."

God has His own especial manner of speaking—

[1] *Entr. spirit.*, p. 261.

He speaks to the heart: and this is what we must get clearly to understand, otherwise our recollection would remain very imperfect. But how can we learn to hear His voice? By shutting our ears to all outward sounds, replies St. Augustine; and, as far as we can, by keeping our own voice perfectly still: "Flee from, and separate yourself a little from, those things which occupy you so much, and try to still those multitudinous thoughts which keep your mind in such a tumult. Shake off those constant cares which weigh down the soul and keep it so entirely a prisoner. Give yourself more entirely to God, and rest in Him at least sometimes. Enter into the chamber of your soul, and shut out all else than God or that which might aid you in your quest for Him. Drive out every other thing, and shutting yourself in, seek for God, and say to Him with all your heart: 'It is Thou alone, O my God, Whom I seek; Thou alone Whom I desire to behold; teach me then, my Lord and my God, how and where I may find Thee.'"[1]

Many people commit the error of thinking that the only proper time for listening to God's voice speaking to our hearts is during the time we set apart for prayer or thanksgiving: why should we not do so also during our ordinary

[1] *Enchiridion*, ch. xxx.

occupations, and why should we not make of our whole life one continual prayer—as it were, the prolongation of our acts of mental prayer? It was undoubtedly such a manner of prayer that St. Francis of Paula had in his mind when he wrote on the rule of a certain religious: *Prayer, twenty-four hours.* "Such persons," said Tauler, "are of more value to the Church in a short time than others who have not this gift of prayer, even should they live for many years; for one single act of recollection, one single glance directed in this manner towards God, is of far more value than very many religious exercises practised without being so disposed." Then, with a sorrowful admission of the rarity of this disposition even amongst religious, this theologian adds: "There are a great number of persons who have worn the religious habit for many years, and yet who take no more trouble to instruct themselves in this union and secret discourse with God than they do to learn what is passing at the Court of the Sultan of Egypt; these things occupy as little either their memories or their hearts as if they never thought about them at all. Since, if spiritual things happen to be mentioned, they understand what is spoken about as little as a man brought up in Greece understands Latin; they appear to be

entirely satisfied with an exterior and quite lifeless performance of such obligations as are required by their condition. Let God join Himself to whomsoever He pleases, it is no business of theirs. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at that these lukewarm persons should, on the occasions when they find themselves in God's presence, always stand in the lower ranks, and should never hear His voice." [1]

This advice to be always, and in all our actions, attentive to the call of God's voice, presupposes that it is never silent, that it is continually speaking. But is this really true? Are there not times of gloom in the spiritual life when all is dark in the soul, and when all sense of God's presence is extinguished in order to give place to a cold indifference, a desolating dryness? Would not the listening to God at such times, the striving to catch the sound of His voice, be to persist in attempting what we could never realize? Might we not be thereby reduced to a condition of inaction at least ridiculous, perhaps even dangerous? "No," answers Courbon; "it would be much to our interest, even during these difficult times, to be in expectation of God's reappearance, watching for the moment of His return. Neither would

[1] Cited by Courbon, *Entr. spirit.*, p. 270.

the soul be idle during that time, for this listening to God in the sense in which we have spoken is nothing else than the holding oneself in God's presence with the deepest reverence, which is literally a perpetual adoration. Now to adore God and to love Him in complete silence is not to be idle; but it is, nevertheless, to leave off speaking in the ordinary way, and to prepare to hear God's voice when it pleases Him to speak to us. . . . This does not mean that we may not speak to Him from time to time. But remember that it must be done so gently, so humbly, and with such moderation, that it does not hinder you from hearing His voice; also that you be not thinking so much of what you are saying to Him, that you be not promptly ready to keep profound silence directly He wishes to speak to you."[1]

To know how to hear God's voice is, as we have seen, a part, an important part, of the science of recollection. When, in addition to this, we have learnt how to speak to God, our science of recollection will be complete.

For the consolation of many persons who lament over not finding anything but commonplace things to say to God, or even at not finding anything at all, we must recall the fact

[1] *Entr. spirit.*, p. 276.

dwelt on by every spiritual writer, that the bare desire, the bare wish, to discourse interiorly with Him constitutes the most eloquent of all languages—viz., the language of the heart. How much God appreciates this language St. Francis de Sales tells us with his accustomed grace: "Love," says this Saint, "speaks not only with the lips, but with the eyes, in sighing and by demeanour. Sometimes silence and even taciturnity take the place of words: 'My heart has said it to Thee, O Lord; my face has sought Thee, O Saviour! I will seek Thy face. My eyes have failed, saying: When wilt Thou comfort me? Hearken to my prayer, O Lord! Incline Thine ears to the voice of my weeping; let the apple of Thine eye never keep silence,' cried the desolate heart of the inhabitants of Jerusalem to their own city. And if the silence of those afflicted souls can speak through the apple of the eye and by tears, such language is certainly the chief way of learning to speak to God, and to hear Him when He speaks to the deep places of the heart. And because this discourse is made up of secret inspirations and aspirations, we call it the colloquy of silence. Eye speaks to eye, heart to heart, and no one hears what is said but the two holy lovers who are speaking. St. Augustine expresses the same

truth more concisely when he says: 'The language of the soul consists in her desires and aspirations.'"

It is recounted in his life that St. Francis of Assisi spent one entire night in doing nothing else than repeating the words: "O my God, Thou art my God and my all."

It sometimes happens that but one word, one thought, one single desire, is sufficient to occupy the heart, and supply what is necessary for our recollection. Then let us beware lest we seek for aught else to say to God; let us rather enjoy His presence in peace, and see that our mind does not disturb this peace of heart by untimely activity. In a word, let us enjoy the inspiration to the fullest extent possible. But I hasten to add that, though this silence may be rightly imposed on the mind at certain seasons of peace, it would be wrong under other circumstances. When the heart is sensible of coldness or insensibility, the mind should come to its assistance, and strive to bring a little warmth to it. Is it to some exercise of the reason, or to some striving of the mind concerning some point of religion, that we must look to produce this result? No, rather to a tranquil contemplation of some one of the mysteries of the Saviour's life, or to some

saying of the Gospel in which the soul might delight herself in peace, or to some inspiration borrowed from the saints, just as it has sprung from the heart's ardour. Such, indeed—better than all the reasonings and strivings of the mind—will restore to the soul a little warmth, and work in it a more profound recollection.

10. We will conclude this study of recollection with a passage of Alvarez de Paz, where he teaches that there are three different forms which the presence of God may assume in us, as attested by experience: "Firstly, the soul may become conscious of God as being in her, enjoying, so to speak, the sight of His boundless majesty displayed before her eyes, but without a distinct understanding of any of the Divine perfections. The soul has found God present in her in a very real manner, and that presence has filled her with fear of Him, with respect for Him, and with love for Him; but she is not able to enter into God, she is only near to Him. Like one who stands on the shore, and who, for want of a boat, can only contemplate the immensity which lies displayed before him; or like one who is near a chest containing some rich treasure, but the key of which he does not possess.

"In the second case the soul is able not only to find God in her, but to realize, and in a very

exalted degree, some one of His perfections or qualities; this knowledge is not the same in all persons. By one His wisdom is most clearly apprehended, by another His goodness, by another His power, and so on. Sometimes, again, He reveals Himself as the Father, at another as the Son, at another as the Holy Ghost. He who is indivisible divides Himself up, as it were, in order the more easily to communicate Himself to the soul.

"In the third place God is wont to reveal Himself to the soul in His entirety. It is no longer a vague knowledge of Himself, nor a knowledge of one only of His perfections which He communicates to the soul; He imparts to her the clear vision of all His perfections. When you look at a portrait you see at a glance all the features of the face. God offers Himself in the same way to the soul's vision: He permits her to take in His entire Being clearly and at a single glance.

"The first mode of recollection is, as it were, a first heaven into which a certain number of perfected souls are able to penetrate. The second mode is a second heaven reserved for a still smaller number. The third mode represents the third heaven so exalted as to be inaccessible except to a very few: the very limited number

of those who are called to the most exalted states of contemplation. It is a gift of a purely supernatural kind—nothing short of a special grace can enable a man to reach it. No effort that he could make could transport him thither."[1]

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. xi.

CHAPTER IV

THE THIRD DISPOSITION: HUMILITY

1. It is not our intention to write a complete treatise on humility here. All we propose to do is to offer to those for whom we write a few practical reflections on this virtue. Those persons are supposed to have already lived the interior life for some time, and to have already cleared a good deal of the land in which the Mystical Life should take root in them and flourish. Hatred of venial sin in all its forms, a knowledge of themselves acquired by frequent and serious examination of conscience and energy in remedying imperfections: such appears to us to be the physiognomy of these souls, at least as regards their principal features. The point in question is, then, to disengage such instructions from the general treatise on humility as would be specially suitable to this class of persons. Also we shall not touch at all on the dogmatic side of humility; and when discoursing on the practical side, which treats of the different degrees of the virtue, we

shall choose those counsels which seem best to harmonize with that particular condition of soul which we have in view.

It may be asked why, among the dispositions to the Mystical Life, we give one of the principal places to humility. We would reply by citing an oft-quoted passage of St. Teresa in which she dwells on the means which her religious should employ to determine God to grant them the mystical graces; and she places humility in the front rank, explicitly declaring that this virtue is closely connected with the mystical life. "I in nowise doubt, my daughters, the urgency of your desire to reach this state (of mystical prayer): and you are right in so doing, and you are justly anxious to learn how to reach such a blessing. First of all, my daughters, you must put into practice what I have recommended in the preceding mansions; and next you must practise *humility, because it is through humility that the Lord yields and gives up to us all we desire.* The first sign that you possess this virtue is the sense of your unworthiness to receive so high a favour as that of the savour of God. . . . It is right that a soul should be humble and detached from everything; but these things must be real and not only imaginary, for the imagination often deceives it; and then the Divine Master

will, I have not any doubt, grant it not only this grace, but also many others which will surpass its desires."[1]

Who can speak of humility without calling to mind those maxims of Holy Scripture: "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble;" "Whosoever will humble himself shall be exalted, and whosoever will exalt himself shall be abased"? And what is the Mystical Life but the most enviable exaltation, and one which we may choose if we will. Is not humility for that very reason enjoined on every aspirant to the Mystical Life? Alvarez de Paz dedicates an admirable chapter to the demonstration of this truth; but it is too long to quote in its entirety, and I will content myself with a selection of those passages which seem to me most striking. "Humility prepares the soul wonderfully to receive all good things. God is the source of all good things, and nothing is so pleasing to Him as to give Himself, to communicate Himself, together with all that belongs to Him, to our souls; but however splendid God's generosity may be, this does not imply that He scatters His gifts with the thoughtlessness of a prodigal. On the contrary, God requires certain dispositions on the part of those on whom He lavishes His

[1] *Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansion, ch. ii.

gifts; it is not His desire that the graces He bestows should remain unfruitful through falling on badly prepared soil. Also God measures the depth of souls before pouring into them the graces they ask for: He is careful to observe whether the vessel is of the required proportions to contain the graces for which it is destined. Well, it is humility which digs down into the soul and makes of it a vessel capable of containing the treasures from on high. And the depth is immense which humility gives to the soul; it is possible for a kind of similarity to become established between the former and the Divine power; because everything which God can give, humility can receive. It can also be said, and with truth, that both God and a humble man possess an infinitude of power, the One to give, the other to receive. It appears to us, then, to be unquestionable that humility is the source of greatness, and that the day will come when the humble soul, however abased it may appear for the time, will be exalted by God."[1]

No one will now fail to see how intimate is the bond between humility and the Mystical Life. And this truth will appear still more evident if it is only borne in mind that the Mystical Life is a series of phenomena in which the soul is passive

[1] *De Præcon. Humil.*, cap. viii.

and in which the action of God is substituted for that of man. When the man remains full of self, the way is barred to the Divine action ; when the man, on the other hand, has emptied himself by means of humility, the Divine action can work free of all hindrance. "Every soul," says Arvisenet, "who holds vanity in abhorrence is near to God ; *it is united to God.* God inclines Himself to the humble ; He loads them with His graces ; *He reveals to them His secrets ;* and draws them gently to Himself. Make, then, trial of this, and you will know that I speak truly."[1]

2. Ascetic writers are, however, far from being in agreement as to the classification of the degrees of humility. Without wishing to appear in the least prejudiced, we confess to a preference for the classification taught by Rodriguez as being at once the simplest and the most logical. According to him the first degree consists in having a humble opinion of self ; and in order to reach this first form of humility a knowledge of oneself is, he points out, indispensable.

Let us suppose that this has been attained, that the soul has often and loyally contemplated itself from within in order to watch its own life —to study itself, and that in so doing it has ceased to cherish any illusions as regards itself.

[1] *Memoriale Vitæ Sacerdot.*, ch. xxvi. 6.

Further, that it now possesses not merely a theoretical, but an experimental knowledge both of its own innate misery and deep-seated corruption. In that case it is ready to rise to a higher degree of humility. It is at this point in the spiritual life that we take this soul and assure it that if it does not seek to rise to the second degree of humility it will never participate in the Mystical Life. The soul's ascent to the second degree, and a practice of humility under this second aspect, if not perfect, at least of the nature of a serious attempt, are preliminary dispositions to this life. It is, then, indispensable to show clearly in what this second degree of humility consists.

3. It consists in prizing humiliations and in loving them.

Yes, humiliations, for the way of humiliation is, indeed, the only sure road to humility. There are many who are under the impression that they love humility — indeed, that they are tolerably perfect in this virtue because they humble themselves in thought, because they consider themselves unworthy of God's grace, and make up their minds that they are only deserving of the lowest place. But then there comes an occasion for putting these fine sentiments of humility into practice ; and the truth is reached of the unreality of this humility—this

humility which indeed remains an imaginary virtue—and of what a lie it is. It is like a fine frontage behind which no house was ever built. When a man flies into a passion at the least affront, when he shuns the slightest humiliation, and passionately excuses himself when the least fault is found with him, what shall we think of his interior sentiment of humility? Charity demands credit for honesty of intention; but justice compels us to confess that his humility is only a fiction.

We have a special purpose in thus insisting on the value of humiliations, for the question is, indeed, very closely connected with that of the Mystical Life itself: for it is a universal opinion among mystics that the dawn of this life nearly always breaks upon souls after being subjected to a series of humiliations or cruel deceptions. God wishes such to be the price paid by fervent souls for this precious gift.

Suppose a soul to be solidly established in the first degree of humility and to have come to look upon itself with real contempt, what, then, stands between it and the second degree? It would seem that out of a realization of our own unworthiness should arise the desire to enable others to share the sentiment. And if we shun humiliation—if we fly from it with a pertinacity which is well nigh systematic—it is a sign that

we have not even reached the first degree of humility—it is a sign that our lips uttered lies when we spoke to God of our interior humility. Rightly does the author of Ecclesiasticus mock such as humble themselves wickedly, but "whose spirit is full of *deceit*." [1]

"Merely to despise and to pour contempt upon oneself is not to be humble," says St. John Climacus: "for how much can we not bear from our own selves? But to bear with joy the contempt and bad treatment of the world is true humility. It may be good to say of oneself that one is proud, idle, or impatient; but it is still better to reserve these admissions till others say them of us." [2]

Till a man has stood the test of humiliation, he does not know how far his interior humility is real. We can, in fact, proclaim it as an axiom which admits of no dispute that the safest and shortest way to attain to a true humility is that of humiliation. "When you wish to go to Rome," says Alvarez de Paz, "you take the road which leads there; and if you wish to reach humility, you must take the road which leads to that virtue. Now, there is no other road which leads to humility than that of humiliation and the contempt of self. To try and avoid humiliation is to recede from, and to

[1] Ecclus. xix. 23. [2] Grad. xxi., art. 17.

turn one's back upon, humility." How loudly is this truth proclaimed, and by how many masters of the spiritual life! "Humiliation," says St. Bernard, "is the way which leads to humility as reading leads to knowledge. If you desire the virtue of humility, you must beware of shunning humiliation; for if you cannot endure to be humiliated, you will never reach humility." And St. Bonaventure is not less explicit: "Since humiliation is the way to humility," he says, "religious should never be ashamed of those duties which are humiliating, nor should they scorn exterior practices of humility."

"It is not for itself," continues Alvarez de Paz, "that you should desire or seek for humiliation; it is on account of the virtue which it should beget in you. No one denies that humiliation is a very bitter remedy, but do you not often take very bitter remedies for the body's health; how much more, then, in order to obtain humility and the welfare of the soul?"[1]

Père Surin does not fear to call this bearing of humiliation the immediate foundation of the spiritual life, that stone which gives solidity to the entire edifice, "the quality in the soul upon which all the habits depend which go to promote virtue." Another foundation, indeed,

[1] *De Humil.*, pars. iv., cap. xiii.

there is, he considers, but he calls it a *remote* one. It consists in a fixed determination of the will to refuse God nothing He asks, and to do everything in one's power to give Him perfect satisfaction. But it is humility—humility expressing itself in outward acts—which he alone considers to be the immediate foundation of the interior life. "The actual foundation-stone of the spiritual life is," he writes, "such a real humility, that a man enlightened from Heaven as to the value of the treasure lying concealed beneath self-contempt, comes to think so little of self that he becomes quite indifferent to everything which others may say or think of him, ceases to care for honours or worldly advantage, never desiring anything for himself, pays no attention to injuries done to, or to contempt poured upon him by others, or, indeed, to anything said against him, nor shows any anxiety to put himself in the right, being quite indifferent to his own interest; and, further, whatever merit he may possess, or whatever his age, he is content and satisfied to be treated like a child, never complaining, even to himself, at not being better treated. Such is the true foundation-stone of the spiritual life. We call it the foundation or principal stone, because immediately it has been laid, there can be built

on it, and solidly built, every kind of good work. Such a soul is fit for any post or employment without risk, and on it God may safely bestow all His gifts. Without it, even should He ennoble it by His endearments, should it be raised to greatness by men, it may be merely the puppet of devils, and the plaything of every wind of pride, vanity, illusion, and ambition ; and for want of this foundation we see so many persons fall over the precipice, notwithstanding that God has endowed them with many supernatural gifts. Others, also, we see lost through spiritual illusions, led astray and deceived by Satan, through having failed to build their soul's house on this foundation ; for which cause they have become ungrateful, and have thrown off their allegiance, possessing too good an opinion of themselves, and following their own lights."[1]

4. The degree of humility which we are now considering has much in common with the supernatural manner in which we ought to act when confronted with humiliation. Our attitude under these circumstances may assume more or less the nature of perfection. It is one thing, for instance, to endure humiliations ; it is quite another thing to love, to desire them. Let us

[1] *Fond. de la Vie Spirit.*, book v., ch. xi.

glance rapidly at those various attitudes which, although of a supernatural nature, are, nevertheless, not all of equal perfection.

(1) First of all, one must learn to *bear* contempt with patience. It is not yet a case of loving humiliations, or desiring or seeking them; we are only at present on a lower rung of the ladder. Should our neighbour do us any injury, should he treat us unjustly, should we meet with disappointment or failure, it is enough that we bear it with patience, and without either exterior recrimination or interior irritation. I do not ask, be it remarked, for insensibility, which was the dream of the stoics of antiquity. I ask that the soul shall remain sufficiently mistress of itself during the stress of humiliation not to betray its suffering by any outward sign, and to impose silence on any tumultuous movements within. I ask for the realization of the wise man's maxim: "Take all that shall be brought on thee; and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience."[1]

Now, it is not possible to practise this patient bearing of humiliation for any length of time without reaping the precious benefit of true humility. St. Lawrence Justinian has compared that virtue to a stream which runs full of water

[1] Ecclus. ii. 4.

in winter, but almost dries up in summer. For humility is often enfeebled by prosperity, while adversity strengthens it and causes it to increase.

One of the advantages of this practice is that it is of daily use, and is within the reach of everyone; for who is there who can hope to live even for a single day without meeting with contempt, or to be always free from humiliation? Opportunity, certainly, will never be wanting; we shall meet with humiliation whether we wish it or not; and it lies with us not to lose these opportunities, but rather to embrace them as often as Providence puts them in our way. "That which pleaseth others," says the author of the *Imitation*, "shall go well forward; that which pleaseth thee shall not speed. That which others say, shall be heard; that which thou sayest, shall be accounted nothing. Others shall be in great praise of men, but about thee there shall be no word. To others this or that shall be committed, but thou shalt be accounted a thing of no use. At this, nature will sometimes be troubled, *and it is not a small thing if thou bear it with silence.*"[1]

The great means for the sanctification of such suffering as is caused by humiliation is silence; and I venture to add that it is also a means for

[1] *Imitation of Christ*, book iii., cap. xlix.

soothing that suffering. Have you not had this sad experience at least a hundred times? We have thought to find balm for our wounds by taking others into our confidence; we have thought to diminish our suffering by relieving ourselves of it in order to confide it to some friend, and we have only added fuel to it: it had been to our interest, as well as being our duty, to keep silence. And to silence should be joined, according to the advice of St. Dorotheus, a prayer for the person who has caused us the suffering; for we owe it to him, as we are in debt to the physician who causes us pain in order that he may heal us. And this prayer for the person who has caused us the humiliation is the surest way conceivable of calming the mind quickly.

(2) We have already before us a difficult task in bearing humiliations with patience, and one, moreover, which presupposes a true generosity, but to love them is a far more difficult one, and one implying more generosity still.

But what kind of love is it which is here necessary? Are we here speaking of a love which is accompanied by joy of the senses? Or of a love which resides entirely in the will? In other words, are we to love humiliations because we find pleasure in them; or is it sufficient to love them because we perceive the

advantage which should be the outcome of that love? In the first case the love of humiliation would be easy and spontaneous: in the second it might well be a forced kind of emotion, the result of the violence which the soul does to itself.

I fear that in this matter spiritual writers have been too exacting, and that they have at least used expressions which have outrun their thoughts; the result has been that, for lack of the distinction to which we have just drawn attention, they have propounded an ideal to which souls will despair of attaining, and the attaining of which is ordinarily an impossibility. Thus Rodriguez writes[1] that perfection of humility consists in making acts of this virtue not only with promptitude, but with facility and *pleasure:* and in order to make his meaning plainer by giving an illustration, he chooses that of a clever lute-player under whose rapid fingering the notes succeed one another both in perfect cadence and tune, and without either the least strain of mind or the least intellectual effort being necessary on his part; and he concludes in these words: "Do you wish to know whether you have acquired perfection in humility, then look and

[1] *On Humility*, ch. xvi.

see whether you experience the same pleasure from insult and contempt which worldly persons experience from the esteem and praise of men: and further, if you find that such is not the case, not only will you never reach perfection, but perseverance itself will become almost impossible to you, for it is nearly impossible to persevere in that which does not cause pleasure. That is the reason why it is so extremely important for us to persevere in this virtue till it has so thoroughly imbued the heart, and so entirely taken root there, that it seems to come naturally and agreeably to us; so that, in fact, it may cause us pleasure."[1]

Is it not to be feared that on reading passages like the above, many may take fright and abandon an enterprize which will appear beyond their natural powers? Is it that the author has imperfectly expressed himself? It is, of course, difficult to give an opinion when one has only a translation to go by. But it seems to me clear that the translation, when read by itself and apart from the Spanish text, confuses two very different things under a common appellation, and is in need of serious correction. No one should ever try and express the meaning of two such distinctly different things as pleasure and joy by one word. Pleasure resides in our faculties of

[1] *On Humility*, ch. xvi.

sense, while joy, which is a purely spiritual phenomenon, resides in our intellectual faculties. The saints have told of the joy they have found in humiliations, but have they ever spoken of the pleasure of being humiliated? It is conceivable for the higher part of the soul to rejoice, even while the lower nature, as represented by the senses, may be in suffering: this dualism, this opposition, is, however, an elementary truth of psychology and morals. And this interior struggle—this rending of the soul, as it were—is it a cause of moral hurt to her? Or, because she suffers in the sphere of feeling, must we admit a diminution of merit in her? Surely not. Surely to insist on insensibility to all suffering as caused by humiliations even in the inferior portion of the soul—further, to insist on an actual sense of pleasure therein, would be, it seems to me, to insist on our ceasing to be men, and pretending to be purely spiritual.

No one would deny that frequency of humiliations, and familiarity both with desire for them and joy in them as regards the superior portion of the soul—that such things would tend to dull sensibility, and to deaden, to a certain extent, the suffering so experienced. But we must beware of exaggeration, or of saying that real virtue is only obtainable when sensibility shall

have become a thing of the past; and, above all, must we beware of ever thinking of associating it with that joy which is the peculiar property of the spiritual faculties. Humiliation is always bound to remain an unpleasant ordeal, distasteful to the sensible part of our nature. And in the saint who has himself most perfectly in hand, it will at times produce awakenings of sensibility, reminding him that he is still human. It will arouse in him movements of intense protest against the yoke both of reason and grace; but these protests, far from lessening his merit, will be to him fresh opportunities of asserting his disinterested love for God.

This doctrine has been well condensed by Monseigneur Gay in a few sentences at once lucid and concise. "It is most necessary, and here more than anywhere, to differentiate between a love which has its origin in the feelings, and that which springs from the will. It is quite possible to feel the greatest repugnance towards works of humility; if, however, the only feelings which we choose to act upon, under grace, are ruled by our will, and if we put our likes and dislikes beneath our feet, trampling and crushing them as we pass over them, then we are humble of heart and glorify God."[1]

[1] *De la Vie et des Vertus Chrét.*, tom. i., p. 343, fourth edition.

The conclusion at which we have arrived is that it is sufficient if our love of humiliation be one of the will; it is not necessary for us to feel that sense of pleasure in it which worldly persons experience in the enjoyment of honours and dignities. Nor is the presence or absence in us of a sense of pleasure any criterion of the degree of humility to which we may have attained.

Now from a love of humiliation should arise, it appears to me, the desire to be humiliated, for it is our inclination to desire those things we love, and to pray for them. Certain writers, in fact, place a love of, and a desire for, humiliation in the same category. Others again draw a distinction, slight indeed, though very definite, between the two—one, moreover, which prevents any confusion between them. It is possible, say these latter, to love through the will such humiliations as Providence places in our path in the ordinary course of events, but certainly without desiring more. To love such humiliations is already the work of an exalted soul, but to desire still further is proof of even a more exalted piety.

This reasoning appears to me most logical, and is absolutely in harmony with experienced facts. A wise director is quite at liberty to

counsel fervent souls to love such humiliations as God sends ; with the aid of His grace it is quite possible for souls of good will to achieve such a love. But he will hesitate twice before advising anyone to wish for further humiliations—such a desire is not within the reach of everyone, not even of all who are fervent. To encourage a soul in that direction without having sounded the depths of its interior aspirations, and without having laid the matter in prayer before God would be to risk disaster. The duty of a director is to assure himself that the spiritual powers of his penitents are sufficient for what they undertake, and that any desire for humiliation has its roots in a real and true love of God, and not merely in an overheated imagination. A line must be drawn, then, between a love of humiliations when they come naturally, and a desire to be humiliated ; and a wise direction will distinguish clearly between them as between two very distinct and unequally exalted degrees of humility.

" This desire for humiliations," says Alvarez de Paz, " appeared so difficult, that many persons will look upon it as a degree of humility, to which a man may aspire, but to which he will never attain. This is to judge things by the standard of man's natural powers.

Have we not known saints who by the aid of God's grace have reached as high as this? However little one may have studied the lives of the saints one can instantly recall a host of examples confirming this fact."[1]

But even if this ideal be not for all, still it is far from impossible; and if God place it clearly before anyone as something pleasing to Him, that person is under an obligation to accept it and to try with all his powers to reach, and to act upon it.

The proud often credit themselves with virtues and qualities which they do not really possess. Those, on the other hand, who are truly humble, and who have gained something like a passion for humiliation, run to meet the contempt of the world half-way, and even pretend to defects and imperfections which would render them ridiculous in other people's eyes. Thus St. Francis of Assisi, desirous of escaping from a demonstration prepared for him one day by enthusiastic admirers, kicked up the mud all over himself, rejoicing at the same time in anticipation of the contempt into which such an act would bring him. St. John Chrysostom[2] says of persons who are possessed of this power that

[1] *De Humil.*, pars. iii., cap. vii.
[2] *Hom. on Genesis*

they have made for themselves a paradise on earth: "For what greater happiness can there be than that of a soul which rests always in a quiet harbour, safe from all tempests, and whose serenity is never troubled?"

To criticize in regard to these matters the conduct of the saints would be to doubt the wisdom of the Church which has singled out acts of this very kind, and declared them to be of heroic virtue. We must also beware of appearing to countenance the smiles of condescending pity with which rationalism regards them. But this is very far from admitting that acts of humility such as are described in the lives of saints can lawfully be recommended to all without distinction. Certainly not; for it is easy to see how humility, carried to this point, implies true heroism, and is an earthly paradise; and at the same time admit that very few souls can reach so high. We must be more exacting in giving permission for this search after humiliations even than we were when it was a case of encouraging a desire for them; and without a distinct inspiration of the Holy Ghost it would be wrong to set before oneself such an ideal. Spiritual writers, also, although they extol this, the highest of all forms of humility, are unanimous in teaching, as Rodriguez has so expressly

done, that such a practice is one "rather to be admired than imitated."[1]

5. We must now try and show how humility should reach to every part of our being, how it should govern all the faculties, and permeate our entire activity. We shall see that there is a humility of the heart, a humility of the mind, and a humility of the body.

In what does humility of heart consist? It consists principally in forgetfulness of self, of our interests, and of our honour, so as to think only of the interests and honour of God. The first enemy for which we must be on the look-out, the subtle enemy with which we shall have to contend, is vainglory—the desire to gain the applause of the multitude, and to play a conspicuous part in the world. It slips into our best actions, to destroy any merit we may have gained; moreover, it is an enemy which fears no foe, attacking even the best souls, and harassing them without ceasing. Vainglory has been called by the saints a storm inside the harbour; to so many souls has it caused mishap—souls who, full of confidence by reason of past victories, have come to consider themselves safe from danger: some miserable temptation to pride or

[1] *On Humility*, ch. xviii.

vanity has reached them, and they have succumbed.

Our Lord has counselled us to do our good works in secret, to hide them as a prudent traveller hides his money; such is the first precaution to be taken—a first act of the most common prudence. But this is not always possible; especially is it difficult to those whose station in life places them in a position where they are continually being looked up to as being bound to set an example to others. And how can they guard against vainglory? There is a way to do it to which the saints give the clue: we must regulate the intention, raise the heart to God, and bring to Him in love our every thought, affection, and act; and when pride knocks at the door, be ready to say to it in the words of the Blessed John of Avila: "You are too late; I have already given to God all I have"; or with St. Bernard who, when experiencing a temptation to pride during one of his sermons, answered: "I did not begin to preach on your behalf, neither will I cease at your behest." It would be to play into the devil's hands to cease from any act of piety just because it involved a temptation to pride. It is sufficient in such a case to spurn the temptation and to keep the heart Godwards. This continual turn-

ing of the heart towards God, which is so strongly recommended by all spiritual writers, is called by them "purity of intention."

This purity of intention should be our constant study; and the measure of our progress in this practice will be that of our progress towards perfection.

St. Ambrose tells us that if an eagle wants to know whether his young are true eaglets or not, he takes them up in his claws and exposes them to the fierce rays of the sun. If they gaze on it fixedly he knows them to be true sons of his royal race, and he carries them back to his aerie and rears them as his own. But if they shut their eyes he concludes that they are bastards, and lets them drop. In the same way can be known a true child of God, for such a one, while turning away his gaze from himself, fixes it on the true Sun of Righteousness, which is God, ascribing to Him so entirely everything that he does that he ceases to have any other end in view than that of pleasing Him and accomplishing His will. St. Ambrose's words are, in fact, nothing but a commentary on Our Lord's saying, as related by St. Matthew, xii. 50: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in Heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."

It is not enough to offer our actions to God at the beginning of each day. "You must accustom yourself as far as possible not to commence anything without offering it to God at the time for His greater glory," says Rodriguez. No mason places even a single stone without first using his rule and plumb-line; in the same way should we apply to our every action the rule of God's will, and of His greater glory. And further, just as no really good workman contents himself with using his square and rule, not once only, but again and again, and until the stone be well set, neither ought we to content ourselves with offering our actions once to God at the outset; but we should at the time make a point of so arranging whatever we are doing that it may be continually offered to God, using such words as these: "Lord, it is for Thee that I am doing this; and by Thy command—because Thou dost wish it."[1]

Even when engaged in our apostolic calling, we must learn to keep the greater glory of God ever to the front, the edification of our neighbour taking but a secondary place. When we are undertaking anything from which any spiritual good may result to our neighbour, we must see that our principal aim be only the

[1] *On Purity of Intention*, ch. vii.

accomplishment of God's will, not the success of the enterprise: so that when we are hearing confessions, or preaching, or giving instruction, we must not allow the conversion, or improvement, or the profit of our neighbour to be our principal object, but always the fulfilment to our utmost of God's will, so as to please Him. After this, whether our efforts be crowned with success or a total failure belongs to God and not to us: "I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase."[1]

What we are able to do is to plant, after the manner of a gardener; but God alone can cause the plant to grow, or the tree to fruit. To speak plainly, the fruit with which we are here concerned is either the conversion of a soul, or its progress in virtue. Well, whichever it is, both come from God; and what a consolation it is in cases of failure to realize that it is not merely on the success of our acts that perfection depends!

St. Ignatius was wont to throw light on this truth by means of a very appropriate simile: "If you want to know," he used to say, "how to behave when ministering to the good of others, study the behaviour of the guardian angels in their ministry to those whom God has

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 6.

confided to their care. They counsel, as far as they are able, those to whom they minister; they guard, guide, and enlighten them, urging them at the same time, and aiding them towards what is for their good. But those spirits do not give way to grief if men make a wrong use of their free will, and are deaf to all good thoughts: the bliss which they enjoy is thereby in no way disturbed. In the same way should we labour with all our power for the conversion and perfection of souls; but when we have conscientiously done our duty, we should learn to rest in peace and not to lose courage, even though the spiritually sick for whom we are labouring do not get well as speedily as we wish, and perhaps do not want to get well at all."

6. It is not always easy to know whether our actions are inspired by a desire for God's glory, or are performed for our own personal satisfaction. There is matter, on the one hand, for the doubt which often causes sensitive souls terrible anxiety, and, on the other, for the illusions which are so welcome to persons of tepid disposition, and well fitted to confirm them in their tepidity. It is wise, then, to have some rule by which we may know at a glance how we stand in this matter, and St. Gregory furnishes us with

such a rule. "When you see a man," he writes, "who preaches well, who is much sought after, and who is gathering a great harvest of souls, stop and think whether the joy to you is as great as if you were having the same success. If not, or if, on the contrary, you feel annoyance and envy, you have an infallible proof that you are not purely seeking God's glory. The Apostle St. James has told us in terms most precise: 'But if you have bitter zeal, and there be contentions in your hearts, glory not, and be not liars against the truth. For this is not wisdom descending from above, but earthly, sensual, devilish.'[1] You are not, then, desirous of God's honour; you are only so of your own. For if you were desirous of God's glory and not of your own, you would be very pleased that another should do that of which you are not capable."

We may, remarks Rodriguez in this connection, apply the same rule, and judge ourselves with the same severity when the spiritual progress of our neighbour, or the graces he may receive, or the favour which God may show to him, causes us jealousy. "Whoever is vexed at his brother's progress in holiness, or is discouraged by the fact that he advances along

[1] St. Jas. iii. 14, 15.

the path of virtue more rapidly than himself, is not genuinely seeking God's greater glory. A true servant of God will infallibly be saddened by the realization that he does not serve so great a Master either as he ought to do, or as he could do: but does it follow that he should both grieve and be cast down because another makes more rapid progress than he? On the contrary, it should be to him a great consolation to realize that, while he may not be entirely fulfilling his duty, there are others who are both serving God, and glorifying Him as they ought to do. The annoyance and discouragement which this realization causes in certain persons is, then, but the result of vanity and of certain secret motions of pride and envy; for if there is a real desire in anyone for God's glory, it is certain that he will feel an extreme joy in seeing others increasing in virtue and perfection, although the realization that he is not making the same use of his opportunities as they greatly disturbs and saddens him."[1]

Another mark of purity of intention is, according to spiritual writers, the unconcern with which we turn towards the task assigned to us by the will of the Superior, or to the work laid upon us by Providence. Little does it

[1] *On Purity of Intention*, ch. xii.

matter, then, to the soul whether its occupation be of low or exalted degree; little does the material act itself concern it. The entire value depends, in its eyes, not on the honour material advantages which may accrue from such an act, but on the will which enjoined it. From such a disposition should arise naturally an unconcern, and this unconcern is an infallible sign of an activity which has God for its end.

Writing on pride, St. Bonaventure teaches that it may be of two kinds, each differentiated by its object. The first, or carnal pride, has for its object the things of the temporal order; the second, or spiritual pride, those of the supernatural order. This latter, adds St. Bonaventure, is a much greater crime than the other. Pride, in fact, is always a theft; the theft of some good thing which does not belong to any human being. This good thing is the glory of God; the proud man lays claim to it as if it belonged to him. Now, he who is puffed up by reason of the good things of the natural order is, without doubt, guilty of theft, since these things belong to God; but it is a theft of little consequence, as the things themselves are only of a very limited value. There is another theft more hateful than this—viz., that of which the proud man is guilty when his pride relates to

the good things of the spiritual order. This kind of arrogance is a crime which steals from God the most precious treasures—the treasures which He has purchased at the cost of all His Blood.

7. If there is one thing which more entirely than anything else necessitates an extreme humility of heart it is, beyond a doubt, prayer; and yet how many prayers are marred by self-love, which destroys the merit of those prayers. How many persons there are who make their prayer with regularity, and yet who reap no fruit from it, because, instead of approaching God as little children, and placing themselves very humbly at His feet while they are speaking to Him, they are all the time, and without daring to acknowledge it, only seeking a vain satisfaction of pride and their own secret personal comfort. And here we see why they give up prayer directly they cease to find joy in it; it is themselves with whom they are anxious to meet, and not God at all.

To understand how important a part humility of heart plays in prayer one ought to read a very curious letter of St. Teresa, published in the third volume of her correspondence.[1] It is written to a former confessor, Don Velasquez,

[1] *Letters*, vol. iii., p. 335.

become Bishop of Osma, and this prelate had desired her to formulate for him a method of prayer. St. Teresa, in a few words, and in deference to his commands, explains to him what Our Lord had revealed to her on the subject; and one hardly knows whether to admire most the holy freedom with which she writes, or the profoundness of the instruction which her words convey. "At the commencement of your prayer," she writes to Don Velasquez, "you will say to God: *I come to Thy school, O Lord, not as a teacher, but as a learner. I would venture to converse with Thy Sovereign Majesty, although I am but dust and ashes, and a miserable worm of the earth.*" I have italicized the preceding words, not to draw attention to them or to the boldness of thought and expression which they betray, but because St. Teresa herself has underlined them in her letter. They are, in fact, as it were, the theme upon which she is about to enlarge, the proposition she is about to expound; and, far from attenuating this boldness of expression, her exposition only brings it more prominently into relief, as will be seen by the following extracts: "It is not sufficient, my Lord, to acknowledge that we are dust and ashes; we must, in addition, possess their qualities, whereof the first is to adhere to the

ground ; but as it is the characteristic of dust to rise when the wind blows, to remain suspended in the air so long as the gust lasts, and to fall back again to the earth when it ceases; in like manner should the soul, of which it is the emblem, remain in prayer, bowed down in acknowledgment of its own nothingness, and when the soft breath of the Holy Spirit raises it into the heart of God and supports it there, manifesting to it the while His goodness and power, it must then show its gratitude in return for the joy of such a precious favour, since God is then bringing it, so to speak, to the very centre of His Being, so intimate is the union which He then contracts with it, treating it after the manner of a dearly loved spouse.

"Again, I have said that you must become, as it were, a worm of the earth. Now, the characteristic of worms is to crawl flat on the ground, preserving at all times an attitude at once submissive and humble, not only before God, but before all creatures, and never to rise up, even when trodden upon or when pecked at by birds. In like manner can it be said that the soul in prayer is trodden upon when the flesh revolts against the spirit, when by reason of a thousand deceptions and anxieties the former tries to persuade the latter how much

better it would be to occupy itself with quite other and more useful things, such as acts of charity towards one's neighbour, learning how to preach to others, or in the everyday business of life.

"To return to our simile of the worm. Even when pecked at by birds it does not attempt to rise from the ground—from the submissive attitude which has been assigned to it by the Creator. Man, in like manner, should remain steadfast at his post, which is an attitude of prayer, even when birds, which are the demons, strike at him, and tire him out, whether by inopportune visions and thoughts, or by temptations to restlessness during that prayer, taking away his attention the while. But to bear with patience all these vexations and importunities is to reap much fruit from prayer, and this is what I call to offer oneself as a holocaust, since it is one in which the victim is so completely consumed by the fire of temptation that nothing remains.

"Neither should we consider it waste of time if we have to remain long in prayer without deriving from it any sensible consolation; on the contrary, we gain much by so doing, because we are working for nothing—solely for the glory of God. For though we may seem to be then

wasting our time, we are no more doing so than are a man's sons working on their father's land ; they are not paid by the day like others, but they receive their reward all together, at the end of the year."

8. Humility of heart, if it is genuine, will also hinder all desire for praise or rank : just one word upon each of these desires.

From a theological point of view, it is impossible to condemn absolutely the desire for approbation. It is not in itself blameworthy, nor is it venial sin, not even an imperfection, to rejoice in what is good in us, or in another's edification by it, or to rejoice in the pleasure coming to us from the praise of men, because, on this point, their praise is only an anticipation of God's. But the position must be recognized as one full of danger ; it is very difficult to keep an even balance on such a tightly stretched rope, and a speedy upset on the side of pride is much to be feared. Short of being a saint, is it conceivable that anyone could breathe for long the perfume of praise without danger ? Is it conceivable that such an one could taste for any length of time the joy of eulogy bestowed, and feed his imagination and memory with such recollections without robbing God of anything which is His due, and without

retaining something for himself? It is very much simpler to cast out systematically all temptation to pleasure which we may take in receiving praise from others, and to get rid of the thought thereof the moment it presents itself to the soul. Such is the means of avoiding dangers otherwise inevitable, and of saving oneself afflictions and agitations of conscience which are most painful.

And the same applies to the desire of rank, and we will lay greater stress still on the danger which lurks beneath this desire; one thing only can justify it—viz., joy in being able the better to serve the Church and the souls of others if advanced to the coveted rank. But need we point out the danger of such an attitude? The saints have ever realized that the desire of rank and honours is not consonant with humility of heart; and have left it entirely to Providence to assign to them their various stations in the Church's army; and they have rejected, as a dangerous temptation, all desire for dignity or exalted station. They have been known to shun the honours which men have wished to impose upon them, but has anyone ever known them to put forward either the interest of the Church or the welfare of souls as an excuse for even the mere desire of honours for themselves?

"St. Teresa," says Courbon, "is very right

when she teaches that no one ever advanced in prayer whilst they were still clinging to worldly honours; 'such attachments,' she adds, 'of however little consequence they may appear, are like tiny insects which burrow in the trunk of a tree and consume its substance, imperceptably causing its death.' And in another place she says 'there is no poison which kills a man's body half so quickly as a passion for honours kills, so to speak, his soul's perfection; nothing stands in such a complete opposition, both to recollection and to prayer, as that secret clinging to the vain honours of this world; nothing leads more rapidly and more often to waste, and nothing more easily blinds the soul's eyes or renders it unworthy of God's favour and converse. It is this wretched love of honour which is the cause of the thousand and one coldnesses which grieve the Holy Spirit, and hinder Our Lord from communicating himself, as He would do, to so many poor souls. It is answerable for the many distractions, cowardices, idle words and little eagernesses, which, like the fine meshes of a net, hold the soul down to earth, and hinder her ascent to God.'"[1]

9. Though of less importance than humility of heart, humility of mind deserves, nevertheless,

[1] *Entr. spirit.*, p. 158 *et seq.*

a few words of mention; it guards us from a tendency to sit in judgment on others—to be for ever finding fault with them. Nowhere do we find this inveterate habit of thoughtlessly sitting in judgment on others, of attributing to them wrong motives, and of twisting in most absurd fashion their intentions and the most insignificant actions they perform, pushed to such an extreme as with the proud. And the process is only natural when you come to think of it: the lifting up of self developed in a man given over to pride is relative; it results from the pulling down of everything else in his environment. "I shall appear the greater if my neighbour is lower than I." Thus the proud man reasons; and as everybody and everything is seen through a prism which decomposes the light according to the beholder's desire, he sees through this prism everything which he wishes to see. Qualities get obliterated, tend to become dim, and at length disappear altogether; while defects are proportionately inflated, take on tints more and more exaggerated, and end by monopolizing the entire field of vision.

The humble man, on the contrary, is careful not to criticize anyone; it would seem to him if he did so that he was usurping God's jurisdiction—putting himself in God's seat. He has

meditated on that maxim of St. Paul: "Who art thou that judgest another's servant? Whether he stand or fall, it is his master only whom it concerns," and he has taken it thoroughly to heart. Should a humble man be witness of some particular action of another which might lend itself to ten evil interpretations and to one charitable one, it is in this latter direction that he will turn; and if the former were too self-evident to be overlooked, he will say to himself: "The temptation must have been very severe for that poor soul to have fallen. How should I have resisted in his place? Should I not have fallen even more easily and more grievously?" Everything thus becomes to him a matter for humiliation—becomes to him a lesson in humility; he sees, indeed, too much which needs correction and censure in his own life to be able to spare either criticism or banter for that of his neighbour.

Humbleness of mind shows itself again in an avoidance of all needless discussions. What but pride is the reason of our being so self-opinionated in argument; of the needless excitement which we betray in defending this point or that; or of the irritability we feel at the least contradiction? In regard to questions of faith or morality, an excess of zeal somewhat overstepping the boun-

dary would be comprehensible; but is it not too often a mere nothing, an insignificant trifle such as any sensible man would scorn to notice? And when it really is a case of defending our faith, or of safeguarding morality, is it wise to fight with such weapons? When we find ourselves obliged to oppose some grave error propounded in our presence, it should be done calmly and without either violence or passion. But if it is a case of something indifferent to us, and the defence of which is no concern of ours, such as a problem in philosophy which in no way concerns religion, a simple theological opinion, a question of literature, science, or one which only concerns politics, we should in all such cases hasten to terminate all discussion, and, while holding to our own legitimate opinion, should be most deferential to that of our adversary. In leaving to him the last word—in abandoning to him the field of battle we are in a way defeated, but in God's eyes defeats of this kind are glorious, they are brilliant victories.

Again, humility should moderate our mental curiosity and keep it within bounds. The object before us is, as we must not forget, to determine the conditions under which the mystical life can most favourably germinate in the soul, and in-

tellectual curiosity is one of the most serious obstacles which this life has to encounter.

Can we go the length of saying that true science is incompatible with the mystical life, or that it becomes most easily acclimatized in ignorant souls? Certainly not: Our God calls Himself a God of knowledge, and one day He will call us to account for the use to which we have put our minds, just as He will with regard to our other faculties. If we have allowed them to lie fallow under pretext of cultivating more assiduously evangelical simplicity, we may expect Him to judge us severely. God can supply all that is lacking in mental culture to any soul of good will. He can lead to a very high degree of perfection that soul which has had neither time nor opportunity of learning; the history of the saints abounds in examples of this kind. But when through slackness or dread of effort study is neglected, we break one of the springs which should aid our soul in rising towards God; we mar the Divine plan which requires the simultaneous action both of the will and of the intelligence. Many a will has been rendered incapable of vigorous effort because the intelligence, which has become impaired by sloth, has lacked the growth and alertness which it might have acquired.

10. There is no reason why we should anathematize all scientific knowledge, but only false science, and science which, without being a danger to the student, is anyhow useless to him. But let there be no mistake in our meaning. When a man's profession necessitates his cultivating knowledge of a purely secular nature, he runs no risk of being estranged from God, on condition, however, that the entire intellectual activity which his studies necessitate is offered to God. With this precaution, a professor, for example, may devote himself to the study of history, mathematics, or literature without running the risk of weakening his union with God, or of delaying the entry into his soul of the Mystical Life. Can we grant the same liberty to those who, without their vocation calling them thereto, or without their profession requiring them to keep in touch with the intellectual movement of the day, pursue such studies solely to satisfy curiosity, to pass the time agreeably, or to make a reputation? However innocent the studies, if they have been undertaken without a serious motive, they must be considered as obstacles to the Mystical Life—as food only for mental curiosity, which implies, if not a venial fault, at least a real imperfection. Let those, then, whose ambition is to reach the Mystical

Life, keep firmly to their resolution, and let them consecrate all the spare time they may have outside the secular studies which their calling necessitates to the various branches of sacred science, more especially to that of mental prayer.

A humble-minded man has nothing but scorn for the vain exaggerations of style and expression which in so many works contrast with the gravity of the subject. To such a person the only thought is how to express well what he has to say, to embody his thoughts in the language and imagery which will best interpret them; his only object, in fact, is to be clear and exact; and it often happens that in this oblivion of all literary conventionalism or of the tricks of style, the truest style becomes possible. Take, for example, any passage either from St. Teresa or from St. John of the Cross, and mark the absolute simplicity with which both these authors write—a simplicity which has almost the appearance of negligence, and you will see the truth of Taine's maxim that "the suppression of style is the perfection of style."

Père Surin draws attention in the following words to the manner in which St. Teresa (who so often and so urgently recommended simplicity to her nuns) managed at the same time to practise what she preached. "To be able to receive the

streams of grace," he writes, "one must strive both for a true self-abnegation and for Christian simplicity. St. Teresa was as exalted as most people, and her entire style so simple and genuine, and her practice so little coloured by affectation, that her confessor said of her that she really believed herself to be stupid—that is to say, that she considered herself as no more than an ignorant little child kneeling before Our Lord, and she never made any pretensions to scholarship; and yet Our Lord had filled her with such wisdom that she was rightly reputed one of the most remarkable women of her day. But her style was not that which was most remarkable about her, except when she had to write on mystical subjects, of which science she was a master."[1]

11. There is also a humility of the body. Let us hastily add that it can only be a reflected humility, an expression of interior humility; for if this latter were absent, what could the former be but a veritable hypocrisy?

As regards public acts expressive of humility, the religious life claims a monopoly; in each community the rule enumerates all such acts, and denotes the conditions under which they have to be accomplished. Indeed, outside the cloister the customs common in religious houses

[1] *Fond. de la Vie spirit.*, book i., ch. vi.

are not possible ; such, for instance, as kissing the ground, bowing profoundly to the Superior, kneeling down when receiving a reprimand or asking a petition.

But there are some outward expressions of humility possible alike to religious and to lay persons. These have been well described by Monsignor Gay : "A truly humble soul will," he writes, "find constant expression in an habitual exterior attitude of humility. There is a something of restraint, of reserve, and calm, which communicates to the whole countenance and to the whole bearing that ineffable beauty, that harmony and charm, which is expressed in the word modesty—there will be modesty in look, modesty in voice, modesty in smile, modesty in the every movement. Here, of course, it is not possible to be too much on one's guard against all that savours of affectation. Nothing savours less of humility than the affected airs which certain religious sometimes give themselves. If they think they make themselves edifying by looking prim, they should realize that they are only acting a part. Nothing is further from true modesty than affected modesty. St. Paul said : 'Let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.'[1]

[1] Phil. iv. 5.

There lies the secret of that enchanting and holy attitude. God is nigh to that soul, and it is ever mindful of the fact; it lives in His presence, and acts under His eyes with good Angels as companions."[1] That modesty was so noticeable a feature with the early Christians, and in such a perfect degree, that their presence was enough to inspire their pagan neighbours with a wholesome reserve. Also, when any pagan appeared more than ordinarily grave or serious, his friends would say : " You must certainly have been in Christian company to-day." What higher praise can be bestowed on the Christian community of those far-off days ?

[1] *De la Vie et des Vertus Chrét.*, tom. i., p. 357.

CHAPTER V

THE FOURTH DISPOSITION: MORTIFICATION

1. "MORTIFICATION," says Alvarez de Paz, "is an act of the soul severing itself freely and of its own accord from the life of the flesh. It is, as the word itself implies, a kind of death, and we must be careful lest this should frighten us. We should regard mortification, not so much as a punishment for sin, as a means provided for us by Jesus Christ for destroying sin."[1]

Without wishing to restate the theory of mortification, which will be found in all spiritual writers, we will briefly explain the nature of that severance to which the above definition alludes.

In order rightly to understand the phenomenon to which we here allude, it is necessary to recollect that there coexist in man two substances, which in nowise resemble one another, either by nature, or as regards their functions: they will easily be recognized by their accus-

[1] Lib. ii., pars. i., cap. iii.

tomed names of "the flesh" and "the spirit," by which words we express both duality and opposition. The former denotes sensuality, the latter reason—the old man and the new—the exterior man and the interior man. These two substances, as Alvarez de Paz remarks, although united to form the human compound, have not, however, the same aspirations, nor are their works of the same nature. Their design is mutually to weaken one another, and, if possible, to supplant one another ; and as either one or the other gets the upper hand, men speak of living a carnal life or a spiritual life. In the former case the soul may be said to become materialized : it abdicates in favour of the flesh. It puts off, as far as is possible, its spiritual nature and its spiritual aspirations in order to share the nature and aspirations of the body. In the latter case, on the contrary, the soul jealously preserves its personal life. It guards it from the encroachment of the body ; and as it is necessary that one or the other should reduce its rival to servitude, it is the soul which in this case vanquishes the body. This, indeed, is not brought about without a struggle. Well, mortification is nothing else than this struggle of the soul against the body. Each act, then, of mortification is for the body a step towards

the grave; it is a blow dealt to the body, and for the soul a gain, just as in a balance dipping on one side means rising on the other.

2. Mortification can be either exterior or interior. Exterior mortification, according to Alvarez de Paz, is that which relates to all the senses, to the tongue, and to the other divers members of the body, and has for its object to prevent them from doing things either actually wrong, or only imperfect. Interior mortification regulates the affections, the intelligence, the will, and the thoughts, purifying them from evil and imperfect tendencies.

Mortification, whether exterior or interior, is, again, capable of another division. It can betoken abstinence, either from things illicit or from things allowable. The man who keeps his affections and senses from all sin practises the former. He who mortifies the eye, the ear, the other senses, and perhaps the intellectual faculties, from pleasures against which there is no law, in order to demonstrate his love for God, practises the latter.

To this latter division I would draw especial attention. It will enable us at once to fix the limits of our survey. With that form of mortification which has for its object the suppression of sin we are not here concerned. We may take

it for granted that readers of a treatise of this nature will be persons who have resolutely determined neither to commit mortal nor even venial sin, and that the faults into which they usually fall are weaknesses and not deliberate sins. To dwell, therefore, on that form of mortification which has for its object the suppression of actual sin would be mere waste of time. We need only concern ourselves here with that other form, which means abstinence from lawful pleasures, as the only one necessary to place before souls of good will, and which has already provided for them the principal stages along the purgative way.

3. Our favourite mystical writer, Alvarez de Paz, will teach us what an important place mortification, as thus understood, should take in the spiritual life, and how necessary it is to all who aspire to contemplation. After having demonstrated how closely all the virtues depend on mortification, he adds: "The gift of contemplation is more entirely subordinate to the practice of mortification than that of any of the virtues. In this connection I wish to draw your attention to a phenomenon which appears strange. It is not a rare thing to meet with religious, both with priests and with lay persons, who are living good lives; they avoid all grave

sin, they practise bodily austerities to a certain extent, and perform certain works of mercy. Why is it, then, that among these you find so few who have the gift of mental prayer—who are able to hold converse with God, either in words, or in spirit, or in truth—so few, in short, who enjoy the light of contemplation? Are we to regard God as a hard taskmaster, or as a tyrant who commands men to serve Him, but who yet refuses them familiar approach? Certainly not, for He has Himself said, 'And my delights were to be with the children of men.'[1] Why, then, should He disdain those whose nature He has Himself taken, thus becoming at once their Chief, their Master, and their Brother?"

"Then," continues Alvarez de Paz, "there are many souls who ardently desire the gift of contemplation, but who do not obtain it; many who wish to rise up, but who remain rooted to the ground; and many who knock, but to whom the door is not opened. Is it that to hold converse with God is without pleasure? Is its charm too slight to attract, or to retain those who have come near? No, 'for her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness.'[2] Do men ask for the proof? It is because those who

[1] Prov. viii. 31. [2] Wisdom, viii. 16.

have begun to taste contemplation reject all else in order to give themselves up to familiar converse with their God; and the love even of kindred is hardly sufficient to tear them from the sweet embraces of their soul's Spouse.

"If the reason be sought why contemplation is so rare, it is because this grace requires a serious and uninterrupted practice of mortification. And as the number of those who are willing to make this renunciation is very small, so also is the number of those who are permitted to penetrate into the Divine cellar and to drink of the wine of celestial converse. Contemplation, again, according to an expression of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, is a very chaste virtue, demanding both peace and purity of soul, as well as the silence of the passions. Now mortification is the only means for bringing about these conditions: mortification alone enables the ray of heavenly brightness, which is of the essence of contemplation, to penetrate into the soul." [1]

Richard of St. Victor is not less explicit: "Let the smoke of mortification rise up to God together with that of desire and of prayer; the one cannot ascend without the other, neither can it be pleasing to God without the other. We cannot, indeed, desire heavenly things unless

[1] Lib. ii., pars. i., cap. ii.

we despise those of earth; as, on the other hand, no man despises the latter unless he has learnt to love the former. It is of necessity that the heart should be single-minded one way or the other. Directly the things of earth begin to lose their flavour the gaze is turned towards the heavens : and the more the palate is wearied from the flavour of earthly things the easier will it be for us it to learn the taste of the heavenly." [1]

St. Ignatius, again, felt very strongly the dependence of contemplation on mortification when he one day refused to allow it to be said of a very fervent religious, " So-and-so is a person of deeply prayerful nature," but rather, " he is possessed of a deep spirit of mortification." He thus affirms the intimacy of the union between the gift of prayer and the practice of renunciation.

Another witness to this truth is St. Teresa, who in many passages forcibly warns her religious that unless they follow the path of mortification they will never become persons of prayer. This will be seen from a perusal of only these few following lines. " However rapidly," she writes, " a soul may appear to be advancing in the way of prayer, or along the path of

[1] *In. Cant.*, cap. ix.

perfection, if she should stop to listen too much to the call of the flesh, or to the satisfaction of sensual desire, it will be a great obstacle to the soul, and will soon arrest her progress. Delicate living and a spirit of prayer do not agree together, and it is certain that such as intend to shun all suffering can never pretend either to an interior life, or to success in the practice of prayer. The most important, or nearly the most important, thing needful is to renounce solicitude for ourselves and that which leads to self-satisfaction."[1]

The author of *The Imitation* has gathered up the traditional teaching on this subject for us in a few concise sentences which everyone will be able to recall: "Why are there so few given to contemplation? Because there are few that can wholly withdraw themselves from things created and perishing. . . . There are many that desire contemplation, but they do not those things which are necessary in order to succeed. The great obstacle to their success is that they rest in exterior practices and things of sense, and little heed perfect mortification."[2]

4. A point now arises as to whether it is expedient to desire extraordinary mortifications,

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch. vii.
[2] Book iii., ch. xxxi.

and to pray to God for great suffering in order the sooner to reach contemplation. It cannot be denied that such a path of the desire for suffering would be of a heroic nature, or that it would be the shortest and surest way to reach contemplation; but are all men called by God to tread this path, and can it be recommended to all? We think not; cruel disappointments may be the punishment of the presumption which often lurks beneath such injudicious desires: "The desire to do and to suffer great things," writes Père Grou, "is often—is, in fact, nearly always—an illusion of pride, a result of our presumption. 'I should like to perform great austerities like such and such a saint. I wish to bear a very heavy cross.' What pride! What vain presumption! No saint has ever had such thoughts. What would be the result? An attempt to perform great austerities at a man's own instigation, which are relinquished as soon as the imagination has cooled down and no longer supports him. God lays, perhaps, quite ordinary crosses upon such persons, and they who have aspired to bear heavy ones fall under the light ones. No, let us ask for nothing, choose nothing; rather let us receive what God sends us, and as He sends it; and let us realize that, as far as power and courage are concerned, we are not strong enough

to bear even the smaller crosses ; and we should be firmly persuaded that, if God had not compassion on our weakness, and without His powerful aid, we should not be able to advance a single step." [1]

But has not this teaching the appearance of reproaching certain saints who have abandoned themselves to a perfect frenzy of mortification, who have not only desired it, but have gone out of their way to court it ? Are we not preaching an emasculated version of Christ's gospel just suited to the weak and cowardly ? No, Père Grou is not blaming all desire for suffering ; he is only blaming such as formulate this desire *on their own initiative.* Should God Himself put a desire for suffering into the soul, that soul, by corresponding with that inspiration, is only walking in the path in which God wishes it to walk ; there is nothing imprudent or presumptuous in this ; but the inspiration must be very real, and is not to be looked for at the outset of the spiritual life. God leads souls step by step, as has been well described by Père Lallemand, who teaches that a desire to bear the cross has, indeed, its appointed place in the spiritual life, but that it is located, not at the

[1] P. Grou, *Man. des âmes int.:* "De la fidélité aux petites choses."

commencement of the ascent, but among the most lofty summits. "At the commencement of the spiritual life," he writes, "we must not pray to God for suffering; the mind should be centred on such things as thoroughly cleansing the conscience, acquiring purity of heart, knowledge of self and of recollection. The next degree on the heavenly stair brings us first to peace of soul, then to converse with God; later on to the infused virtues, and to the gifts of the Holy Ghost. God then makes known to the soul His intentions and His wishes; some He leads, like St. Francis Xavier, by work; others by suffering, like St. Lidwine; others, again, through opposition and persecution, as St. Ignatius; but of our own selves we ought never to make any particular choice, otherwise we should be always in trouble; not having yet been put to the proof, it would be like undertaking a giant's burden without having the necessary strength. But once having entered on the vocation to which God has called us—one entailing labour, sorrow, and humiliations—then no work will be too great for us, our health, even, will often be proof against the greatest austerities."[1]

But to resume, let there be no doubt but that any fixed desire or prayer for great sufferings or

[1] 2e *Principe*, art. iii., ch. iv.

humiliations is very often a result of illusion. We are very reluctant to accept sufferings which God does send; we ought, rather, gladly to accept these before asking for fresh ones. A sign of illusion is when the character, instead of showing signs of that joyous peace, exhibits a tendency to harden. We may, then, not express this desire to God, nor may we make this request unless we feel called to do so, and this call has been recognized by some experienced director as one coming from God, and after a careful examination of the case on his part.

5. Scorn for the practice of mortification in little things, such as opportunity so frequently offers to us, is not an uncommon result of this desire to do great things, and for great suffering. Such a result is sufficient to condemn this desire and to show that it does not come from God. Ascetic writers have ever praised mortification in little things as being one of the most important elements of perfection, and our survey of mortification would remain very incomplete if it did not demonstrate the importance of this practice.

In order to consider the question from the point of view which is specially before us, we will commence by declaring with Alvarez de Paz that mortification in small things is an excellent

means of acquiring that freedom of soul which is a necessary preparation for contemplation. "It is not only," he says, "our grave imperfections which can hold us back; the most insignificant faults entangle us at times, and hinder us from taking our flight. It matters little whether the cords which hold us are heavy chains or silken threads, so long as the threads are sufficient to deprive us of our liberty. What does it matter that it is only a nutshell that covers our eyes, if it prevents us from seeing. The first-fruits of a mortification in little things are perfect freedom of soul, and that peace, full of delight, which he only really understands who has experienced it. There are souls who inhabit regions well nigh celestial—dwelling-places which the passions hardly ever reach. Prosperity does not elate them, adversity does not trouble them, neither can honours nor rank tempt them, for their only desire is towards God. Though such a condition would appear to result from a most exalted contemplation, we may feel sure that it would not be possible without a perfect abnegation. Now it is the little daily mortifications which give rise to this perfect abnegation, and dispose the soul to receive the gift of the most sublime contemplation." [1]

[1] Lib. ii., pars. i., cap. xvi.

St. Dorotheus[1] does not hesitate to enter into details on this point—details which would appear, perhaps, needlessly minute to that class of mind which dreams of doing great things, and which stops short of actions. But, on the other hand, this theory of perfection will be delightful to those souls of good will who have nothing to offer to God but small sacrifices ; it will help them to realize the fact that perfection is precisely the resultant of these little sacrifices, insignificant, perhaps, in appearance, but infinitely precious in God's eyes. "Let no one imagine," he writes, "that the conquest of self can be so difficult considering that the opportunities for victory are given to us at every instant. But I will explain : Suppose you are out walking, and curiosity tempts you to look at some passing object ; resist the desire, and turn your eyes away. Or you are tempted to join in some frivolous conversation ; resist the temptation, then, and pass on. Or the idea comes to you to go and find your cook, and ask him what he is preparing for dinner ; do not go. Or you see some object, and curiosity tempts you to ask who has brought it there ; do not do so, but keep silence. In mortifying yourself in little things, you will acquire the habit of

[1] Doct. i.

mortifying yourself at every opportunity ; and whatever happens to you, you will be as content as if everything had happened which you wished. See, then, how much little things conduce to your perfection, and how helpful they are to you in conquering your will."

"A single act of mortification," says Père Surin, in his turn—"a single act, such as abstaining from a curious glance—may appear in itself to be of small moment ; but if it be done with intention of pleasing God, it is a great step towards perfection, and we find that it is usually the case with those who thus restrain themselves for God in little things that they have within them a great source of grace. One man picks a flower and innocently smells it ; another offers it to God, denying himself the little satisfaction. Louis de Blois says in his *Institution* that the difference in the action of the two men is as great as the distance from earth to Heaven."[1]

The saying of Louis de Blois, to which Père Surin alludes, is as follows : "The renunciation for God of sensuality, or of our own will even in things of very slight importance, is to do that which is more pleasing to God than the resurrection of many persons from the dead.

[1] *Fond. de la Vie spirit.*, p. 150.

Two men find a beautiful flower in their path. The first wishes to gather it, but on reflection he desists, saying to himself, 'Let us leave it for God.' The other picks it without further thought. This latter has not, of course, committed any sin; but the former, by abstaining from plucking it for God's sake, acquires a superiority over the other as great as the distance separating Heaven from earth. The ascetic should always be saying in his heart: 'It is for Thee, my God, that I abstain from looking at this thing which is not necessary for me to see; it is for Thee that I refuse to listen to that thing; for Thee that I abstain from saying such and such a thing, and deprive myself of such and such a satisfaction. He cannot entertain God in the deep places of the heart perfectly unless he is mortifying himself in this way from all that is inordinate."[1]

I would draw especial attention to the last words of the above quotation, for it would be difficult to put in stronger language the impossibility of reaching mystical contemplation without a continuous mortification in little things.

Let no one be astonished at this insistence of the Saints in recommending mortification in little

[1] *Inst. spirit.*, ch. ii.

things as being one of the surest means of reaching mystical contemplation, and argue from the seeming triviality of the practice enjoined that its outcome can be no such sublime reality as it is asserted. Père Grou replies that "faithfulness to little things demands nothing less than a perfected virtue, for it means, in short, a dying to self at every moment of the day; a complete correspondence with grace; the prevention of any thought, desire, word, or action in the least displeasing to God; and the accomplishment of every action with that perfection which He expects of us, and this without any relaxing of effort or concession to nature. I confess that, as far as the pursuit of saintliness is concerned, that I know nothing of greater moment than this faithfulness, nothing which demands more sustained effort."[1]

We have, then, the support of the saints for the axiom: "Without mortification in little things, there can be no mystical contemplation." We might even add: "Without mortification in little things, a right mental prayer is impossible." "Why is it," asks Courbon, "that we find in so few persons any desire to apply themselves to mental prayer, and that the majority

[1] *Man. des âmes int.:* "De la fidélité aux petites choses."

of men have no wish even to hear the subject mentioned, unless it is the frivolous occupations, the perpetual search for amusement, and the false freedom in which they live, which render them so unworthy of the graces which God has in store for them, and so deaf to his good inspirations ?"[1]

6. Mortification is a vast subject. It knows no limit short of that of human activity. It should reach out to the whole man, and to all the manifestations of his activity. There is, then, a mortification of the body, and a mortification of the mind.

Let us first consider mortification of the body. It is, anyhow in theory, universally approved. When it comes to practice, people think it wise to proceed with that caution which St. Teresa has so derided in the eleventh chapter of *The Way of Perfection.* Plausible pretexts are certainly not wanting. Here is an example: Is there not a danger that exaggerated penances may deprive me of the health necessary to keep the rule ? And so it comes to pass that in order to keep oneself in sufficient health to observe the rule, the rule is broken at every moment. And if excessive prudence in this matter be the case with those living in a cloister, what shall we say

[1] *Entr. spirit.*, p. 182.

of those who live free in the world and to whom no positive rule is known to remind them of the great precept of bodily mortification? To what cowardly compromises do they agree? To what transactions, often little to their honour, do they consent? Too often, as in St. Teresa's day, they have accomplices in their confessors and directors —men who have their doubts on the subject, and who are only too ready to suggest teaching which will calm all their scruples, and lull them to sleep in a false illusion. From such a state of things it follows that, though corporal mortification continues to be enjoined by the rule, for practical purposes it remains a dead letter.

We must acknowledge, at the present day, that temperaments are less robust than in St. Teresa's days, and that our constitutions have, in varying degrees, suffered from those nervous disorders which the doctors declare to be the weakness of our age. Many persons, in fact, may consider that such preaching of bodily mortification is unseasonable. But is not the deplorable situation which we have reached owing to the very fact of having neglected this precept? Is it not owing to men having given more to the body than was good for it? How many doctors and preachers of hygiene there are who recommend a return to the simplicity of earlier ages,

and who are advising the relinquishment of a whole host of things which the softness of our days renders necessary, but which are really detrimental, as a means of restoring the general health of the community? St. Teresa's advice has, then, lost nothing of its opportuneness, and it will be well for us if we meditate on it.

"The first thing to do," she says, "is to rid oneself of love of the body, and this, for certain religious who are by nature fond of their ease, is no slight accomplishment; and if, in addition to this, they have an excessive care for their health, they have as stiff a battle to fight as persons in the world. It would really seem as if some people one meets with in monasteries had only gone there in order to put off, as long as possible, the hour of death, so great is their anxiety to prolong life by every means in their power. Your object in coming to this house was to die for Jesus Christ and not to live delicately in order to serve Him. Take care, then, that you do not fall into this trap of Satan—for it is to him that you owe the temptation that this is necessary in order to keep the rule. And what happens? That persons are at so great pains to retain good health in order to keep the rule, that in reality they are always breaking it.

"Have no fear of being indiscreet on this point; it would be wonderful if you were to be. Confessors are always in fear lest their penitents should endanger their lives by excessive mortifications. We no sooner think we have a headache than we stay away from choir, although going there would not make us any the worse. Then comes a day when we absent ourselves because we really have a headache; another day because we have been ill while there; yet another day for fear of being ill there.

"What a sorry plight for us, we who had hoped to reap good things and satisfaction, and a never-ending glory through the merits of Jesus Christ. If we cannot, like Simon the Cyrenian, help Him to bear the cross, we should at least shed tears with the daughters of Jerusalem. Do we imagine that by thinking only how to make things easy for ourselves we can gain a right to that joy which Christ won for us at the price of His own tears and blood? Was ever error so great? Can anyone, not a madman, hope thus to reach Heaven?"[1]

In the twelfth chapter of the same work St. Teresa exhorts her religious to put away once and for all the absurd dread, of death which can only paralyze the soul's practice of mortification

[1] *Way of Perfection*, ch.

and crush all her springs of generosity: "What matter if we do die? This body of ours which has so often set us at defiance, why should we not sometimes treat it in the same manner? Believe me, my sisters, such a determined attitude is of more value than we think. Let us, then, learn with Our Lord's help to enslave the body, and at length we shall get it under subjection. And once this great enemy is vanquished, we shall have wonderful courage wherewith to fight the remaining battles of life."

Listen, again, to St. Teresa's reply to the devil when he tempted her to relax her mortifications on account of her delicate health, warning her that she was endangering her life: "'It matters little to me if I die; I need only the Cross, not amusements.' And I found in the long run that, though my health was always bad, the devil's temptations and my own cowardice made me worse, for it is much better since I have given up taking so much trouble about it. From this it is clear how important it is for those who are commencing mental prayer not to allow their ideals to be lowered; in which they should believe me, and learn by my faults, since I know it by experience."[1]

[1] *Life of St. Teresa*, ch. iii.

"Often enough," says Père Surin, "the way of bodily mortification is not valued by spiritual persons as highly as it deserves, with the result that they remain, as it were, in themselves, without passing into God as much as they might do, and because they do not thoroughly do battle with their nature. After a man has passed out of the life of self, after he has renounced evil, vanity, and all satisfaction arising out of such things, he still remains in himself, from which position he can only be driven out to pass into God by hard treatment of self. This is what zealous people do who pursue the soul and drive it from the ease which it takes in itself and in the flesh. They treat themselves as one would treat an animal which one wishes to teach; for instance, when they have to go in a certain direction in order to be of use there, they are beaten from one place to another, and when they get to the place where we wish them to be, they are made much of, so that they may feel at home there and nowhere else. So when we desire to constrain the soul to live in the spirit, which is where God wills it to be, it has to be beaten in the flesh, and given no repose till it is in the spirit, where God caresses and consoles it. Thus, truly zealous souls, in order to pass wholly into God, mortify

the flesh, so that the soul may depart out of it, and go to God, Who is pure Spirit, and can be pleased by that alone which is of the Spirit. The good things which are thus gained are more precious than any words can say, and they only know their worth who have had experience of them."[1]

7. To say that mortification of the senses is the principal part of bodily mortification will surprise no one. Who is there who does not know what deadly enemies we have in the senses — enemies which have need of being watched with a sleepless vigilance? St. Gregory calls them "roads open to the soul in order to pass out of itself, to desire things of an inferior quality to things spiritual; windows from which it looks out and sees things exterior, and, seeing them, lusts after them."[2]

Continuous mortification of the senses, then, is necessary for all who desire to become persons of prayer. "Such," says Courbon, "is the sovereign means by which we may taste God, and become successful in prayer: short of this we shall never make much progress. The reason of this is evident: our senses are always doors by which a thousand and one things enter

[1] *Fond. de la Vie spirit.*, book v., ch. iv.
[2] *XXI. Moral.*, cap. ii.

our minds and interrupt our converse with God ; and the impression of these things remains on us, and hinders us from seeing Him, notwithstanding that He is so near to us, and always in us. They cause, as it were, a noise and a hindrance, and prevent our hearing His voice, although He often speaks to us by His inspirations ; we become, in fact, so preoccupied by a thousand thoughts and a thousand desires that we have no time left to listen to Him, not even for a quarter of an hour, and even this would seem very long to us, not being accustomed to attend to God, or to converse with Him.

"It is necessary to teach persons of this kind that if they wish to pray rightly they must mortify the senses for the rest of the day ; and instead of always looking about them, constantly listening to, and ceaselessly talking about, what is going on around them, they must retire within themselves from time to time, in order to meditate upon God, and, while in His presence, to consider their own misery and poverty of soul, and not necessarily wait to pray till they are in church, since He is everywhere, and always ready to hear them. This is such a truism that, short of it, there can be no really solid virtue. One sees persons every day who give alms, but who have the grace neither of humility, patience, nor

charity, and all for lack of the wish thus to mortify their senses."[1]

8. Concerning the practice of mortification as applicable to each of the senses separately, we are fearful on the one hand of overstating the true doctrine which is the teaching of the Saints, and on the other of diluting it. We feel, therefore, the need of some safe authority upon which to lean, and thus of avoiding the putting forward of propositions which emanate only from ourselves. It is Alvarez de Paz whom we have taken as our guide, and whose conclusions we are about to state, thus reserving to ourselves the modest rôle of translator.

Alvarez de Paz raises his voice first against all the indiscretions of which the eyes can be guilty. He will not allow that either old age, or grey hairs, or acquired virtue, can excuse people for deliberately looking at things which are of a dangerous nature. Then he expressly forbids the theatre, and balls, and other profane amusements to such as desire to lead an interior life. He condemns with equal severity the reading of all doubtful books, novels—even good novels—which, he declares, tend to fill the mind with futilities, and to feed the imagination with images, if not actually dangerous, at least tend-

[1] *Entr. spirit.*, p. 183 *et seq.*

ing to cool the soul's ardour. As to studies of a purely profane nature, no one desirous of union with God should pursue such further than their condition requires. He does not fear, at the same time, to praise certain mortifications of the eyes, which will seem very minute to persons in the world, but the importance of which will not escape the notice of interior souls: "When you are paying a visit, do not give way to curiosity as to what is on the table, or what furniture there is in the room. When you leave, do not look to see who is coming after you, or who is passing near you, unless you cannot help it. Remember that your eyes were only given you to look at things necessary or useful."[1]

Opportunities may often arise for mortification of the sense of hearing. The ears should be closed to all doubtful conversations and to all sensuous music; show your disapproval of slanderous talk, however mild its nature; turn your back with scorn upon all praise or adulation under whatsoever form it may present itself; never desire to pry into the secrets of another, and never wish to listen to anything said about another unless it be to his credit; or, if otherwise, unless your duty obliges you to know it: such, in

[1] Lib. ii., pars. ii., cap. ii.

substance, is, according to Alvarez de Paz, the way in which the interior man sets to work to mortify his sense of hearing.

The same writer points the finger of scorn at the use of scents as unworthy, not only of persons consecrated to God, but of such as are ever so little seriously minded: he then proceeds to exhort pious persons whose charity leads them to perform any particular duty, such as visiting the poor or the sick, not to permit themselves to be discouraged because of the unpleasantnesses, or their visits shortened on account of the discomforts inevitable in a sick-room.

Who is there, again, who does not know the tyranny of the sense of taste? and how few there are who are able to shake themselves free of it! This sense requires to be watched sternly and continuously; and often when we think that we are really gaining the mastery, a sudden rebellion occurs to teach us that the time has by no means arrived when vigilance may be relaxed. The wise advice on this subject of Alvarez de Paz may be read with advantage: "Always begin your repast with prayer, and with an intention to take such food as is necessary, not for your pleasure, but for the accomplishment of the Divine will, and in order that your body

may acquire, through its customary refection, the strength to serve God well.

"As long as you are in good health, do not ask for any special food; content yourself rather with such as has been prepared for others.

"Choose among the dishes served always those which will most mortify your sense of taste, or which would seem most fitting for a poor man.

"If you are able to do so without drawing attention to yourself (and this is certainly often the case), avoid entirely those delicacies which persons in the world seek after—a man should be ashamed to eat only for pleasure.

"Do not take even the commonest food except at the demand of your appetite, and always leave the table before your hunger has been completely satisfied.

"Do not allow your thoughts to be entirely absorbed by your food, rather give your attention to holy thoughts or to the reading which may be going on.

"Do not drink rare or choice wine, and never talk either about what you are eating or about what you are drinking.

"Do not drink except at meal-times, and if you are thirsty at other times, drink only what is necessary to quench your thirst." [1]

[1] Lib. ii., ch. v.

Everyone agrees in considering the sense of touch to be the most dangerous among the senses, and as it resides everywhere in the body, it is not only in one place on the body where danger lies for the soul. Spiritual writers compare our other senses to small openings—trifling gaps which one soldier can guard ; while the sense of touch is a fully open door—a wide breach, which nothing short of a numerous company experienced in battle can defend. We could not treat this subject fully without having to repeat ourselves when the time comes to speak of chastity. Let it suffice to warn our readers, with Alvarez de Paz, to avoid all softness, especially in such matters as luxurious beds, and all over-refinement in dress : particularly is this latter important, where, under pretext of seemliness, persons are tempted to follow the ridiculous, not to say pagan fashions of the day. "If a lady of quality," says, very wisely, Père Surin, "orders herself a gown made of coarse material under the plea that it is good enough for what is necessary, her motive might be open to criticism ; but if she denies herself a silk gown because a woollen one will suffice, her conduct in this matter will be most praiseworthy, since other very good persons whose conduct has much to recommend it, have often

acted so, and have paid little heed to the whisperings of the world, preferring the approbation of God and of the saints. In general the following rule will suffice : For persons to confine themselves to what is necessary for them ; in this lies perfection as far as regards the question of dress." [1]

Objection is sometimes taken to the excessive smartness of dress indulged in by certain persons as being hardly consistent with the true Christian life, to which they reply that they only dress according to their circumstances, and that they are not alone in dressing so smartly. " Such a reply," says Père Surin, " is very feeble. For in order to say that anything befits your circumstances, it is not sufficient that just a few persons should do it, it should, rather, be the custom and manner of the good and virtuous persons of your own class. Since if, on the contrary, there are persons of your own social position who never dress in that manner, and no one finds fault with them, how can you say that your circumstances demand such things—more particularly if you are known as a religious-minded and devout person." [2]

9. With mortification of the sense of touch might perhaps be connected the subject of

[1] *Catéch. spirit.*, part vii., ch. ix. [2] *Ibid.*

bodily austerities: it is, indeed, chiefly this sense which austerities affect. But all ascetic writers prefer to class this latter form of mortification by itself, and we will follow their example, and devote a few pages especially to the practice of bodily austerities.

We must first of all make an important reservation in the case of such as are ill or infirm, and make it clear that our exhortations to austerity are not addressed to them. Sickness is, indeed, the very best form of corporal mortification—the mortification which we ourselves have not chosen, and which is imposed directly by God, and is the exact expression of His will. "If the other mortifications," says Monseigneur Gay, "are silver, this one is gold; for though, on the one side, it originates in ourselves, being the result of sin, nevertheless, on its more important side, and as everything which happens depends on God's Providence, it comes from God's hand. And how just are the blows which He strikes! And how efficacious! Better than works, better than all voluntary penances, they reach to the quick of the 'old man' in us, and tear us, as it were, out of ourselves. I venture to assert that patience in illness—especially during a long illness—is the very crown of mortification, and therefore the triumph of

the mortified soul. But for him who is not mortified, sickness is the day of delusions—a day when pretended virtues evaporate in smoke, and that which underlies the soul is laid bare. He who hitherto has been accustomed to walk delicately, now develops the sharpest of tempers; he complains of everything, and sometimes of everybody; he is most exacting; the doctor can never be seen often enough—he never has sufficient remedies, nor are they of sufficiently good quality. Heaven and earth, in fact, are ransacked in search of what may procure him the least relief."[1]

Sickness, then, may take the place of all exterior mortification, and take it most effectually. Borne with patience, it is an excellent practice of the law of mortification. The sick have not, then, to choose their own mortification: God spares them the trouble of making this choice in choosing for them Himself.

We must also remember that the practice of austerities should be governed by a wise discretion. The *via media* is, we must admit, not always easy to discern between the cowardice which invites to ease, and to a tendency to do nothing, and a fervour in the way of austerities

[1] *Life and Christian Virtue:* "Of Mortification."

which would draw us outside reasonable limits. A man is a bad judge of his own case under such circumstances. How, then, can the difficulty be solved? In having recourse to some external authority—either that of a superior or of a confessor. They alone can decide in what measure austerities can be adapted to our temperament, and especially to the duties of our position. And this consideration — viz., the duties of our position—is, in fact, one of the things which should carry most weight in deciding the measure of the austerities which each can bear. Austerities which hinder anyone from fulfilling the obligations of his office or of his calling are, for that very reason, to be condemned as being opposed to the clearly expressed will of God. Fastings or other mortifications, for example, which would deprive a preacher of strength to preach well, a schoolmistress belonging to a religious order of strength for her classes, or the mother of a family of power to perform her domestic duties, far from being pleasing to God, could not be other than displeasing to Him. It is at this point that some authoritative utterance should be sought in order to calm our scruples or stimulate us to action, and to enable us to strike a balance by determining the exact amount of austerities

which befit us. And when the decision has been made, it should be accepted with submission, whether it appear over-severe or too indulgent. In the former case, God will help us to bear the burden which has been placed on our shoulders, and which may, perhaps, be too heavy ; in the latter, He will only consider our obedience, and will not hold us responsible for that interpretation of the law of mortification—an interpretation which has, perhaps, been too lenient.

In reading the following passages the reader is requested to note the important reservations which we have made above.

"No exhortation to austerity," writes Alvarez de Paz, "is necessary for such as are really cultivating the spiritual life zealously : the Holy Spirit who guides them, contrition for past sins, and the sorrow they feel by reason of their daily imperfections—all these constitute a sufficient motive for waging desperate war against the flesh. Such exhortation is, on the other hand, most expedient when addressed to those who, not realizing sufficiently their own poverty, nor the deadly hatred which the flesh bears to the spirit, commit the imprudence of treating their bodies leniently. This is sometimes the case with persons new to the spiritual life, and who

desire to model their behaviour in this matter of mortification on that of veterans and old men enfeebled by age and infirmities. They forget all that these old men have gone through in days gone by—the hard work which they have wrought and the difficulties which they have overcome. They see only their present manner of life, and are pleased to think that, in imitating them, they are doing all that is required. Surely, however little wisdom a man may have, he must see through a sophism urged only by lukewarmness. Is it not to wish to rest before labour, to sit down before one has set out on one's journey, to reap the fruits of victory before the battle? Nor again is it to be wondered at if the aged and infirm should have to abstain from all austerities, confining themselves to interior mortification. That which appears surprising is that persons of robust health, realizing both the fire of the passions within them, and the revolt of the senses, should commit the imprudence of treating the body with softness—that body which is the source of all their temptations. Such persons ought, of course, to place themselves under obedience for purposes of guidance, so that the limits of reasonableness may not be exceeded ; but in so far as the chosen director approves, they should give themselves courage-

ously to austerities, and refuse any compromise with that most dangerous of all enemies.

"So long, in fact, as the body lives, so to speak, the life of the age—in other words, lives unmortified—so long is the interior contest impossible, nor can the subtle enemies be vanquished who strike in the dark.

"If incentive be required to the practice of austerities, it should be sufficient to consider the example of the perfect. Who amongst these, unless hindered by grave infirmities, has not practised mortification? How many amongst them have hesitated to subdue the flesh by hair shirts, the use of the discipline, and by fasting and vigils? If we read the history of the saints we shall find no single example of anyone who has not subjected his body to this kind of mortification."[1]

Out of the long list of corporal austerities it is necessary to make a selection; for they are not equally within the reach of all. Each person must take his own strength into consideration, and ask advice of the superior or of some authorized person. There are, however, two forms of austerity which are more practical than others for the greater number of persons, and which suit every condition of life better than

[1] Lib. ii., pars. ii., cap. ix.

others—viz., fasting and the discipline. Père Surin [1] considers these two the most efficacious for the soul, and that they correspond to the double method to which men have recourse when laying siege to a fortress. "Fasting," he says, "is of the nature of a siege laid to the enemy's fortress, and which saps his strength little by little, forcing, at length, a capitulation by patient endeavour. The discipline is, as it were, an assault which does its work speedily, taking the place, as if by force."

He then proceeds to extol the happy results produced by this latter mortification, which appears to be his by preference: "The discipline brings about three principal results—firstly, it drives away melancholy and imparts cheerfulness to the mind by dislodging the devil; secondly, it wins great graces for us from God's pity; thirdly, it helps a man generally to amend all his faults, compelling the soul to such an intense humility, when it is chastening itself for any shortcoming, that even should God, for its good, withhold from it sometimes the amendment which it desires, it is hardly possible for it to fail in triumphing at last."

Those who have read the life of Père Lacordaire will remember the fervour and fre-

[1] *Catéch. spirit.*, part v., ch. iii.

quency with which he used the discipline. That practice of what he preached secured for him the right to protest, both before his own religious and before persons living in the world, against those preachers of a false spirituality who would relegate corporal austerities, as it were, to a museum of antiquities, as weapons suitable, indeed, for the ages of faith, but of no use to the present generation. It was to the Gospel that this great religious turns—to the Gospel which never dies, and to the doctrine of Jesus Christ which never changes, when he protested against the enervation of the Christian spirit, and against the insipidities which are offered to souls in place of the life-giving and salutary law of corporal mortification.

What rule can we lay down touching these two kinds of austerities? This is a difficult problem, and one not to be solved with mathematical precision. So many circumstances have to be taken into consideration in dealing with such a question, circumstances which vary from person to person, that it would be rash to specify too closely. Moreover, however broadly we may lay down a rule, it is always in some way absolute and final, and that is precisely what we here have to avoid. Our wisest course will be to shelter ourselves modestly

behind the masters of the spiritual life, quoting their teaching without comment. Père Surin has, I think, summed them up very wisely. Here, to begin with, is what he says concerning the practice of fasting: "No rule is possible here except that which discretion suggests. Anyone desiring to obtain complete mastery over himself and his vices may take the following standard for his guidance—viz., to restrict his nourishment as far as possible, but so as never to diminish the strength necessary for him to do his duty; and it is certain that by the abstinence he will be making such advance in the spiritual life, and cutting the ground from under his enemy's feet, as could in no other way be accomplished, and this is evident from the practice of all the saints who have gone before." [1]

It will be remarked that the writer seems to have been at some pains not to be very explicit. The rule which he lays down concerning the use of the discipline is a little less uncertain: "How often the discipline should be used it is not easy to prescribe. Nevertheless, we may say that once a week is not much, twice a week is better, thrice denotes fervour, but every day is perfection, and this is the case with such as are hurrying with giant strides along the spiritual path,

[1] *Catéch. spirit.*, part v., ch. ii.

adjusting all according to their powers and the good advice of their director." [1]

This will, perhaps, appear to many to be very austere teaching; but we would draw special attention to the corrective contained in the last phrase of the quotation. In conclusion, Père Surin appeals to authority both to decide these questions, and to determine that which each person can bear. In fact, nothing can be wiser than his advice, or can more effectually calm the scruples of such as are always imagining that they are not doing enough.

St. Francis of Sales counsels us in case of doubt to take the more indulgent view; nor ever to weaken the body by rash penances which may do it irreparable injury: "Stags," he says, "lose their fleetness of foot if they are either too fat or too lean. We, in like manner, are highly exposed to temptation when our body has been either too well nourished or underfed. For the former causes it to become overbearing in its ease, while in the latter case it becomes disheartened and restless; and, as we lose control over it when it is too well fed, so it ceases to be able to serve us when it is too lean. Upon the whole it is better to keep our bodily strength in better condition than is actually

[1] *Catéch. spirit.*, part v., ch. ii.

necessary, rather than the reverse ; for while one can always reduce it when one wishes, one cannot always build it up again." [1]

10. Mortification, as we have said at the beginning of this chapter, may be either exterior or interior, according as it is of the bodily senses, or of the interior faculties of the soul. It now remains for us to deal with the latter.

We must at the outset recall a truth too often forgotten—viz., that without interior mortification, that of the bodily senses is of little value. "To live in the desert," says St. Cyprian, "to be clothed only in sackcloth, to live on vegetables, to fast, and to sleep on the ground—all these things are not sufficient to make a good religious. A very worldly heart is sometimes hidden beneath such outward circumstances. If religious are called to take up a public position in the Church, any imperfections from which they suffer are most noticeable to all ; they appear to be more enslaved to the senses, more impatient of wrongs done to them, and more drawn to revenge themselves than even laymen in like circumstances. And what is the cause of this falling away ? The seeking to mortify the body rather than to mortify the soul. Does not St. Paul teach us that though corporal mor-

[1] *Introd. à la vie devote*, part iii., ch. xxiii.

tification is useful up to a certain point, true piety reaches all things? Heaven forbid that I should appear to blame those who labour thus to mortify the body and bring it under subjection. I wish only to warn them that Satan is skilful enough to transform himself into an angel of light, and to persuade souls that they are holy because of the bodily mortification they practise, whereas in reality they are still full of faults and imperfections." [1]

Alvarez de Paz declares that not only is interior mortification the more important, but that bodily mortification should always be secondary to it, as the means is subordinated to the end: "To rest content with bodily mortification while neglecting that of the interior faculties would be an act of folly: it would be like taking a journey merely for the pleasure of travelling, and with no object in view, such, for example, as a town where one would rest. For the aim and object of mortification as applied to the senses is the reformation of the inner man; and this latter mortification becomes, if not useless, at least of very little value, unless the ultimate intention be to obtain rest and tranquillity for the soul. We may here apply the words of the Saviour, 'Many are called, but few

[1] *De Dupl. Martyr.*

are chosen.' There are, in fact, many who subdue the flesh, who chasten the body energetically, and who have obtained the mastery both over their senses and their tongue; but there are few of them who subdue their pride, who obtain the mastery over their tempers, or who bend their judgment to that of others. The former remain, from a spiritual point of view, mere children; the latter grow to be men, for they have realized that bodily mortification is only a beginning of virtue, a means for reaching the real destination, which destination is interior mortification—purity of soul."[1]

We cannot here enter upon the details of interior mortification without risk either of repeating ourselves, or of encroaching on the matter forming our next chapter. It will, doubtless, be remembered that while treating above of recollection, we said that this was nothing else than mortification of the imagination and memory; in the chapter relating to humility, on the other hand, we explained the power this virtue has of mortifying both a man's intelligence and his self-love. This point also will be brought forward again when treating of obedience as an element in the religious life.

Before, however, bringing this chapter on mor-

[1] Lib. ii., pars. iii., cap. i.

tification to a close, we would recall the fact that, in spite of the fear which the word inspires, and in spite of the fact that the concept of death does enter into its etymology, it is in reality a step towards life. Mortification lays serious claim to driving out of the soul that life which sin has brought into our nature; yet is its object merely to empty out the soul? No; for as the life of sin departs, another life is waiting at the door ready to enter, and take its place — the life which Jesus came to bring into the world, the Divine life. This Divine life will always take possession of the soul in proportion as mortification makes room for it. In practising mortification, whether of the body or of the soul, we are not moving towards death, but towards life — towards that life which alone is worthy of the name, alone is worthy of being lived.

CHAPTER VI

ON MORTIFICATION THROUGH THE THREE VOWS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

Outside those mortifications which he undertakes voluntarily, and apart from the rule, there are others which a religious is bound to practise —viz., those which follow from the three vows. These are poverty, chastity, and obedience ; they are for him a triple source of mortifications— mortifications most efficacious for bringing the soul into a more perfect union with God.

Although these three virtues are practised with a special perfection in the religious state, and with a very singular merit which has its source in the three vows of the religious life, that does not mean to say that they are only within the reach of religious. Without mentioning the priest, whose vocation prescribes absolute chastity, and, to a certain degree, poverty and obedience as well, I maintain that no one, whatever may be his condition or state of life, is

debarred from the practice of these three virtues. The character they assume in laymen will not always be the same as that which we find in religious or priests ; but in spite of that difference of character, the virtues themselves will be none the less real in laymen than in religious or in priests. For this reason the following pages are not addressed solely to religious. Since contemplation is not the exclusive privilege of the religious state, no more are the means for its attainment.

A complete treatise on the three virtues of the religious life is not to be expected here. We have only taken these virtues into our consideration for the special purpose which we have in view—viz., their connection with contemplation, and the perfection which they must assume, in order that they may act as a preparation for the mystical life.

Alvarez de Paz calls them the fertile source of the other virtues, and in the following words he justifies the use of such an expression : "First of all," he says, "they remove the obstacles which stand in the way of all the virtues. Now, what are these obstacles ? St. John sums them up for us very concisely when he speaks of 'All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence

of the eyes, and the pride of life.'[1] Now, poverty drives out the lust of the eyes—viz., love of riches, and the desire for those things which dazzle the eyes in order to delude the heart. Chastity, again, vanquishes the lust of the flesh, by which is meant those voluptuous passions toward which our flesh is drawn with the frenzy of brute beasts, unless held back by the cords of continency. As to obedience, it is by this that we keep in check the pride of life, the love of domination. And once we have removed these three obstacles, what is easier than the practice of the other moral virtues?

"These three virtues, again, make of us a holocaust most pleasing to God. For a holocaust is a sacrifice which gives to God the entire victim, wholly offered to His glory. Now these virtues consecrate us to God together with all our possessions, and kindle in us at the same time the fire of Divine love. And what are a man's possessions? To begin with, his exterior and temporal goods: through poverty he renounces them. Then there is the body, which may become a source of voluptuousness to him: chastity dries up this source. Lastly, there is the soul, self-opinionated and wilful: through obedience he yields it up to God. Now, between

[1] 1 St. John ii. 16.

the class of righteous men, who keep the use of their own wealth, who marry, and who preserve their own free will, and the other class of righteous men, who have renounced all these things for God, there is an immense difference. The former offer a simple sacrifice to God, while the latter offer to Him something far more preferable—viz., an uninterrupted holocaust."[1]

A study of each of these virtues in succession will enable our readers to see even more clearly how worthy they are of the praise which we have bestowed upon them, and will satisfy us that the putting of them into practice is in itself the most excellent of mortifications, and therefore the most excellent preparation for the mystical life.

Article 1.—On Mortification through Poverty.

1. The definition which Alvarez de Paz has given of poverty appears to me to be very true. According to him it is the renunciation both in deed and will of all temporal things for the love of God, and from a desire for perfection.[2]

As regards poverty, mankind may be divided into four classes. The first includes those who are poor neither in will nor in deed—those rich,

[1] Lib. v., "Proemium."
[2] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. i.

proud men who cling to their wealth, and to whom it is a matter of ostentation. The second class includes those who are poor in deed but not in will—that is, those of the really poor who are tormented with the desire to become rich. To this class belong those revolutionaries whose doctrinal formularies ill conceal their greed, and who, under the generic style of socialists, dream of overturning the present social order, so that they themselves may seize the goods which the present possessors enjoy. The third class includes those rich who are poor at heart; men who set no store by their wealth, and to whom it is no temptation to vanity. To the fourth class belong those who have made themselves truly poor for God's sake, and whose hearts are entirely detached from that which they have renounced. When this detachment is supported by a vow, it constitutes the poverty of the religious life.

The constituent parts of this poverty are three in number. "The first requisite," says Alvarez de Paz, "is detachment of the heart, of the will, and of the desires. Secondly, it is necessary that detachment of the heart should be accompanied by detachment in deed. Lastly, it is necessary that our scorn of wealth and of everything transitory should have for its source both

the love of God and a desire for a more perfect life." [1]

2. Need we remind our readers that poverty has the first place in the Beatitudes, and that the first words of the wonderful Sermon on the Mount were "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven"? Need we recall the fact that Our Lord's first lesson to the world was one in poverty? How eloquently does He preach this virtue to us in His birth—in the poverty with which He willed that it should be surrounded! He is born in poverty, He lived in poverty; so absolute, indeed, was that poverty, that He was able to cry: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." [2] He died in poverty; in His last moments He sees the soldiers dividing His raiment, and St. Joseph of Arimathea had to buy a shroud in which to bury Him. He had well earned the right to preach poverty, and to set it forth as the foundation of the perfect life, saying: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor." [3]

In another part of the Gospel, Our Lord promises to those who renounce all that they have

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. i.
[2] St. Matt. viii. 20. [3] St. Matt. xix. 21.

for Him, that He will give them a hundredfold even in this life. The Fathers interpret this saying for us in the sense of a formal promise of God's choice graces, and of spiritual favours quite specially reserved for voluntary poverty. "What is meant," says St. Peter Damien, "by this promise of a hundredfold? Surely the many consolations of the Holy Spirit, His many visits and tendernesses, sweeter to us than honey. *What are they but the many abounding and fragrant gifts of God, well known to those who have experienced them, and which no words can express to those who never know them.*" [1]

Is it forbidden to see in these lines a transparent allusion to the grant of the mystical graces allowed by God as a compensation for the sacrifice of poverty? Surely Père Surin also must have had this gift in view when he wrote: "Any possession of creatures erects a partition between God and the soul; so much so that if this partition be removed, *the soul meets God*, whence she derives her perfect satisfaction. The little we possess is a hindrance to meeting God, just as a man who, having a small pebble held in front of his eye, cannot see the sun any more than he could see it if a mountain stood in the way; but he who has nothing at all

[1] Cited by Alvarez de Paz, *De Paupertate*, ch. xiii.

before him can look freely all round him. When St. Francis was asked to name the thing which would be of greatest service in going to God, he said it was poverty. The reason was because poverty clears away every obstacle, so that there remains nothing between God and the soul."[1]

3. Again, all the founders of religious orders have raised their fabric on poverty, as on the only foundation capable of sustaining the weight of a durable edifice. In the world it is impossible either for a house or a state to grow and prosper without money. But the building we are here contemplating is, as Rodriguez tells us, a very different thing from those which are built in the world. It must not be wondered at if the foundations also are very different. To build on such a foundation as is necessary for a structure built according to natural laws—viz., one which has wealth for its basis—would imply a misconception.

Alvarez de Paz compares the functions of poverty in the religious state to those of a tree's root. If you cut the root, the tree cannot continue to live; if, on the other hand, the root remains alive, the loss of some of its branches

[1] *Catéch. spirit.*, tom. ii., ch. iv.

cannot imperil the tree's existence. And he adds: "If, O religious! Our Lord should permit, as a punishment for thy pride or ambition, the loss to thee of meekness, or gentleness, or of some other virtue, as a tree sometimes loses some of its branches; nevertheless, if love, which is the guardian of poverty, remain to thee, thou mayest hope that by the Divine mercy thou shalt recover thy losses. But if thou tearest up the root of the tree, which is poverty, and shouldest, like Judas, become covetous of money, that is a sign that the evil is deeper. Then make haste to retrace thy steps, lest thou become so hardened as to make thy return to God impossible."

But what reason have we to urge for the statement that poverty is the root of the religious state? Our Lord's reply to that young man who asked Him what he should do in order to have eternal life: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast and give the price thereof to the poor." That was as much as to say: "For you the beginning of perfection will be to renounce all your temporal goods. This renunciation is the root which will enable the tree to grow, and to lift its branches to the sky. But if this root does not exist, in vain would you attempt to embrace the state of perfection;

never would you possess that which is of the essence of perfection."[1]

In order to grasp St. Teresa's views concerning poverty, it would be necessary to read over the whole of the second chapter of *The Way of Perfection*. I am compelled, however, to confine myself to a few quotations. "Divest yourselves," she says, "of all desire for temporal things, otherwise you must not hope to reach perfection. . . . The less we have, the fewer cares do we have; and Our Lord knows well that I am more troubled when the alms we receive are in excess of our wants, than when we are in need.

"In the same way the mind should never be given over in any way to excessive anxiety concerning temporal things. If such a misfortune were to fall on this house, the least of all the sisters should raise her voice to Our Lord, and humbly represent to the prioress that the community has strayed from the right road, and that such a lack of faithfulness will gradually bring about the destruction of true poverty.

"This happy poverty is a possession which contains within itself all blessings; it confers on us, as it were, the command of all the riches of the world; for he surely commands great wealth who can afford to scorn it. What do I care for

[1] Lib. v., pars. i., cap. ii.

the favours of the great and of Kings, if their wealth is nothing to me, or if, in order to be pleasing to them, I have to cause the least displeasure to my God? What are their honours to me if I have once truly realized that the greatest honour to a poor man consists in being really poor?

"Let your dearest wish be to keep poverty intact. Let everything correspond with our glorious coat-of-arms, our houses, our garments, our desires, our words, and most of all our thoughts. So long as you act thus, you need never fear any irregularity finding access to your house. St. Clare called poverty and humility the two great walls of the religious life, and she desired that her monasteries should be surrounded by them. Indeed, if poverty be well observed, it will be a surer bulwark than the grandest of buildings. Beware, my daughters, lest you take to building grand houses. I ask you this both for the love of God, and for the sake of the precious blood of His Son. If such a thing should ever occur, the wish that I am conscious of is that the buildings should fall the very moment they were finished. Our houses should be unimportant, and everything about them should breathe the spirit of poverty. Let us be like our King in something. All He had in this

world was the stable of Bethlehem wherein He was born, and the cross whereon He died. I pray to that adorable Master that He will sustain us with His hand, lest we should ever appear to be falling away from that perfection of poverty."

4. Ascetic writers are unanimous in warning those living in religion of one special danger. It happens occasionally to a man that after having courageously renounced all his temporal goods, he will cling to some one article of which he has the use, and by his failure to give to God generously in severing this little attachment, he risks the success of his life in religion. What inconsistency in him who has divested himself, perhaps joyously, of everything he possesses in the world, not to be able in the long run to resist a miserable attachment to a cell, a book, or a garment! And how clearly we see in such a move the astuteness and tenacity of the demon who never acknowledges defeat but revives the temptation under most unexpected forms. "It is always the same passion," says Cassian, "which dominates these souls; it has only changed its object. But as far as the question of guilt is concerned, how little does the thing itself matter which is the object of our attachment, whether it be of more or less value? Why have we renounced things which are of real import to

us, except in order to learn how to despise lesser things more easily?"[1]

Certain religious pass over this tenacity as regards trifles too easily, reassuring themselves with the thought that, after all, they possess neither gold, nor silver, nor houses, nor, indeed, any one of those things which excite the cupidity of worldly persons. The holy Abbot Mark, however, refuses to accept such an excuse, and in the following dialogue with his soul he re-establishes the truth: "You will say to me, O my soul, that we do not amass riches, and that we possess no lands. That is true; but I will reply to you that it is not the fact of possessing wealth or lands which is harmful, but the bad use of them. Abraham, Job, and David were rich men; but they were none the less pleasing to God, because they were not in any way attached to their riches, while we who are not rich are enamoured of the meanest things. We have, it is true, neither gold nor silver, but what does that matter if our hearts cling to things of even less value?"[2]

5. The virtue of poverty can be practised in a manner approaching either more or less to perfection—*i.e.*, it admits of different degrees.

[1] Coll. iv., ch. ii.
[2] *In Biblioth., S.S. Patrum.*

Must we begin by excluding all those who have possessions—all those who are rich? Are they of necessity for ever shut out from the enjoyment of the blessings of the first beatitude? I reply that Our Lord did not say only, "Blessed are the poor," but that he added, "the poor in spirit" —in heart—in aspiration. Now is it possible for the rich man, in the midst of his abundance, to practise the spirit of poverty, of detachment from riches? Why not? I do not pretend that the operation is as easy for him as for the poor man, but it is not impossible. Now, how is the rich man to know that he has attained to this spirit of poverty? The question is important, and rather a delicate one to answer. Is the speaking of wealth in a scornful manner to be a sign? It is one not too much to be trusted. One meets with people who appear to be riveted to their wealth as a convict to his cannon-ball, and who long to live in a garret instead of in a palace, but who realize at the end of a week that they cannot do without their most comfortable surroundings.

The first authentic sign of the spirit of poverty in a rich man is when he begins to be master of his wealth instead of his wealth being master of him—instead of being its slave. Until he gets the mastery over it, and until he has ceased

to allow himself to be dominated by it, a man is not poor in spirit. In the second place, a man should watch his own attitude under a loss of money. "If a rich man who is a Christian," says St. Paulinus, "suffers some loss, it is to him as the loss of a garment, it is not his skin which has been torn off." It is plain that the loss of a garment may be somewhat grievous, but nothing like the suffering which would be felt if our skin had been torn off. And in like manner also should the soul possess freedom of action where riches are concerned. Spiritual writers point, as a third sign of poverty of spirit, to a readiness to give in charity. Do you find your heart harden, they say to the rich, at the sight of misery, or do you stoop down to the poor man who is in suffering, whenever you meet him, and allow the crumbs from your abundance to fall upon him? If so, however rich you may be, you are poor in the gospel sense. But if not, you must renounce your share in the first beatitude.

It is, then, an established fact that a man may be rich and yet of the number of those to whom Our Lord said: "Blessed are the poor." Again, amongst the rich themselves there are degrees of poverty, for it may be more or less perfect: this question of degree in poverty, however, concerns

principally religious, those who are vowed to that virtue.

6. We will adopt the classification of Rodriguez, which is, moreover, that of many ascetic writers, and will distinguish these degrees of religious poverty. "The first division," says Rodriguez, "contains such as give up all outward possession of worldly things, but who cling to them in heart, and who allow their affection still to linger round them."[1] Of such it may be said that they have merely attained to an exterior poverty—a poverty which is on the surface, and nothing more; it is a poverty from which the soul—*i.e.*, the spirit—is absent; it is there merely in appearance.

To a higher degree belong those who are really detached, and not in deed only, but also in heart, from worldly things, and who have severed all connection with things which are superfluous. But detachment, in these souls, does not yet extend to things which are necessary; and such persons, says Rodriguez, are extremely careful that they lack nothing; they want to be well fed, well clothed, well lodged, and so on; and directly they cease to have everything they want, they fret and complain. "Is this a true poverty?" asks St Bernard,

[1] *On Poverty*, ch. vi.

"and how strange it is that so many people should glory in being poor, and yet arrange so that their poverty consists in their lacking nothing, and in having everything comfortable! But this is not being poor; it is being rich, and being so even in a greater degree than persons of the modern world who have not always all their conveniences."[1]

In order to reach true poverty it is necessary to rise even one step higher—viz., to poverty in necessary things; which means that we must choose from among those things which are themselves necessary only that which is absolutely indispensable; and further, that we should be always ready to restrict rather than to extend the limit—a limit in itself always somewhat fluctuating of those things which we call necessary. Are we really content to suffer for the love of poverty even in the things which we are obliged to use? This would be an infallible sign that we possess the spirit of poverty in its fulness. "Look and see," says Rodriguez, "if you are content to wear an old coat which is all worn and patched; content when you are short of something at your meals, when the servant passes you over, or when that which is served is not to your taste; content when you are given

[1] Sermo. 4: "De Adventu."

the most inconvenient cell in the house. For if you are not really glad when all these things happen to you, or if, instead of delighting in them, you seek to avoid them, it is a sign that you have not reached the perfection of poverty in spirit."[1]

7. What are the practical means for a religious to insure within himself the reign of poverty, and to develop the spirit of this virtue? Alvarez de Paz answers this question for us with his accustomed clearness and fulness. I will select a few passages from the remarkable chapter which he has devoted to this study. Speaking of those living in religion he says: "If you are desirous of increasing the spirit of poverty within you, you must never treat the things of which you have the use as if they belonged to you. Now you are using those things as if they were your own when you desire them and possess them with too much affection; when you receive them from your superior, not as a charity which he bestows on you, but as a debt which he owes to you; when you give them or lend them to anyone without permission, however trifling their value may be. By so doing you lay claim to their ownership. You will avoid this danger by accepting the things of which you are permitted the use with the gratitude and humility

[1] *On Poverty*, ch. vi.

which befits a poor man; also by refraining from giving them or lending to anyone without the permission of your superior; also by taking great care of them.

"If you feel an excessive affection for any of these things, for a cell, a table, or a book, if you can do so, give up the use of that object; or if you cannot do without it, on account of its being absolutely necessary to you, ask permission of your superior to exchange it for another object of the same kind. In doing this you will overcome a dangerous affection, and will acquire a perfect freedom of mind.

"The superior himself should assist this desire for detachment, if usages permit of his so doing. He will be acting wisely in sometimes enjoining these kinds of exchanges on his religious. It will be a means of at once guarding them from exaggerated attachments, and of enabling them by this means to put into practice the poverty which they have professed.

"You should behave yourself in everything as befits a poor man, and let your devotion to poverty manifest itself by the way in which you make use of exterior things. Be content with ordinary food as the poor are, food in no way choice; drink common wine, well diluted with water; keep nothing in your cell except the

things which are strictly necessary; love to wear threadbare clothes of common material. In a word, let everything you do betoken poverty, and reveal that you are poor."[1]

This advice is given to all religious, but special obligation in this connection devolves upon superiors. To them it appertains to watch and see that the spirit of poverty is preserved in communities. And in order to procure this result they should not, as some might think, be hard; it is not severity which they should use, but rather great kindness and benevolence in providing liberally for all the material wants of their religious. Indeed, according to the wise saying of Alvarez de Paz, stinginess in a superior, or narrowness of mind in this direction, would be an incentive to his subordinates to seek from their neighbours, and from their friends in the world, that which they lacked in the cloister. And what ill consequences might arise from such a practice! It would mean the ruin in a short time of the religious spirit in a community.

With that holy freedom which considers it necessary to denounce evil wherever it is encountered, Alvarez de Paz warns superiors of the mistakes into which they sometimes fall

[1] *De Paupertate*, ch. xiv.

regarding the point now under consideration. "Certain superiors," he says, "wish at all costs to have sacred vessels of great value for their churches, and splendid ornaments. They do not consider that to see that their brethren lack nothing that is necessary is a duty for a superior, whereas the possession of sacred ornaments of great value is merely a counsel; and that it is never permissible to make light of a duty, in order to perform a work of supererogation.

"Finally, other superiors are met with who are hard, and one finds in them an absence of pity for others, which is accounted for by the robust constitution which they enjoy, and by the privations which they have themselves endured in their youth, when they were in the world. They treat others with the severity with which they treat themselves; the sufferings of others do not move them, nor have they any pity for weakness. To such we would only say: 'Remember that a superior should be a father, and for yourselves have a fear of the judgments of God; for, when the days of your own old age and infirmities arrive, He may give you, as is His custom, superiors who treat you hardly, in punishment of your own hardness.'

"We have, of course, no intention of en-

couraging laxness in superiors; of such we have a horror. The only object we have in view is to insure in communities that, together with the reign of charity and kindness, should subsist that of the spirit of poverty. Now, this spirit flourishes in that religious family where each one is supplied with all that is really necessary for him; and is able, of his own will, to give up something, even of those necessary things, in order to make of it an offering to God, as a most acceptable sacrifice of mortification."[1]

Article II.—On Mortification through Chastity.

1. Chastity ranks higher than poverty in the hierarchy of virtues. It implies, indeed, a sacrifice of a nobler kind than that of poverty, and the victory over a more imperious appetite. Poverty renounces for God only temporal things—things which are outside of ourselves—and we often purchase for ourselves both peace and happiness at the price of this sacrifice; while chastity offers the body in sacrifice to God—a part of ourselves, and a part which is very dear to us. There is no one who does not understand the desire for sensual satisfaction,

[1] *De Paupertate*, ch. xiv.

how loud it calls, and how tyrannical it is. The mortification, also, of this desire is meritorious in God's eyes in quite another way from that of the desire for temporal goods.

There is no state of life which has not its chastity; marriage itself has such. But here we are specially concerned with chastity as it is practised in the religious state.

The following is the definition of Alvarez de Paz concerning this virtue: "Chastity in religion is the virtue by which we renounce all the pleasures of the flesh, promptly and joyously, and this, not only as regards the body, but also as regards the mind; and this renunciation is sealed by a perpetual vow, in order that our soul may the more fully apply itself to God."[1]

According to this definition chastity consists first of all in a complete abstention from all fleshly voluptuousness: it is purity of the flesh. But chastity goes further—it reaches even to the soul, in order to wean it from all guilty thoughts and from all impure desires. In order to be chaste it is not only necessary to keep the body pure, but the heart and mind as well. It is for this reason that St. Paul demands from Christian virgins purity both of body and of mind.

[1] *De Castitate*, ch. i.

"Chastity," says Alvarez de Paz, "should from the very outset appropriate the soul, and enthrone herself there, in order to descend thence to the body. When a general desires to capture a town, his principal objective is the citadel, where the enemy has concentrated his best troops; he knows that victory at this point should ensure him possession of the entire town. In the same way chastity seeks to establish herself first of all in the soul, which may be called the citadel of the man; thence she dominates the body and keeps it without difficulty in the right way. The soul is the mistress, the flesh is only a servant. If the lord cultivates chastity, the servant will end by participating in the same sentiments. Till the time comes when it is entirely subdued, it may, perhaps, meditate both flight from, and revolt against, the law of chastity. But the soul, where love of chastity bears rule, will be able to keep the body in check, restrain its tendency to turn aside from the right way, and gradually reduce it to obedience. Should the flesh, on the contrary, become weak through suffering or illness, should it be already half dead, all would be in vain were the soul not chaste—no reaction would be too great. The flesh in such a case would be like an unbroken horse; when the time arrived for health

to be restored, it would throw its rider and break away from all restraint."[1]

We have added above, when defining religious chastity, that it is sealed by a perpetual vow. The necessity of this vow is evident; for would it be proper to abandon this virtue, which is of the very essence of the religious state, to the frailty and fickleness of man? Is it not a necessity to ensure to it the same steadfastness as the religious state itself by placing it under the security of a vow?

The last words of the definition point to the object of this vow of chastity. Its object is to liberate the soul, to free it from a bond which holds it down tight to earth and hinders it from rising to God through love. The religious life is the life of those who tend towards perfection —who foster the ambition to reach the Divine intimacy. Now what can there be which would more certainly bring about the failure of this scheme than a love of voluptuousness and grossness?

Mental prayer even of the most ordinary kind is in itself incompatible with impurity. In its commonest form this prayer presupposes a certain intimacy with God, for it is God leaning down to His creature in order to hold

[1] *De Castitate*, ch. i.

converse with him ; and the God of all purity can only incline towards souls who are pure. If He does not find purity in a soul, He turns away and passes on. We see, then, that chastity is intimately connected with the life of prayer, and the indispensable condition of that life. If purity is thus necessary to prayer in its lowest form, how much more indispensable is it to prayer in its most exalted degree—viz., in its passive form ? And besides, have we not already demanded a rigid purification of all our sensible faculties as a preparation for that prayer? And have we not seen that to any soul in whom the senses have not been brought into captivity to God, the mystical life is debarred ? It will be understood that we abstain here from discussing over again the necessity of physical purity ; but if purity of soul is an indispensable preparation to the opening out of the Mystical Life, purity of body appears to us to be even more so.

Let us attempt to throw a still stronger light on the necessity of chastity as an element in the religious life. "Public opinion," says Alvarez de Paz, "is exacting in the matter of chastity, and rightly so, and it brands with shame such religious as lay themselves open, however little, to criticism in regard to the keeping of this

vow. Any monastery inflicted with this pest is disgraced. When we see a religious who has not as much as might be desired the spirit of poverty, or who fails to practise to perfection the virtue of obedience, we shut our eyes to his faults, or else we extend our indulgence to him. But if it is his chastity which has suffered shipwreck, we can only unanimously show our horror, and express our aversion. And this is not the outcome of Pharisaical pride on our part; we are in no wise imitating the Pharisaical arrogance of those who jeered at the Magdalen at the feet of Our Lord. We are only inspired by zeal, and by the conviction which we have reached, that the religious state would soon founder, swept away by public contempt, should such a defect be tolerated. In the opinion of seculars, all we religious form such a compact body, that the sin of one reflects on all. It is useless for us to protest against this injustice —to deny the truth of such a view; one has no power against what is after all a fact. It follows, therefore, that only too reasonable is our apprehension lest public opinion should place us in the same category with him who commits the offence, and hold us responsible for his ignominy."[1]

[1] *De Castitate*, ch. ii.

St. Thomas[1] shows how public opinion is here only the expression of the truth. Going, as he habitually does, to first principles, he lays it down that carnal enjoyment, even when legitimate, as for example in marriage, makes it impossible to reach the goal at which the religious state should aim. This goal is, as we have already pointed out, the union of the intelligence and of the will with God—the familiar friendship of God. Now, how distracting to the mind and impairing to the will are carnal pleasures, even the most lawful! For anyone to yield himself up to these pleasures is to turn his back upon religious perfection. And if there is such a wall of separation between the religious life and sensual emotions, even when those emotions are lawful, what shall we say of unlawful pleasures, of pleasures which defile the soul? "The life of the religious is then no longer a life at all; it is an anticipated hell. Those thoughts which should rise towards God, behold them debased to the level of the flesh. Those desires which should only be winging their way towards things celestial, behold them falling into a filthy ditch; and the body which was the temple of the Holy Spirit, is become the

[1] 2. 2., quæst. 186, art. iv.

abode of the devil. The spirit has become flesh, so to speak, and is, as it were, swallowed up by a flood of shameful thoughts, criminal desires, and bestial acts. It is while in this condition that on certain days fixed by the rule the religious approaches the Sacraments, and he comes to them without the wish to emerge from this slough. Is this a tending towards perfection? Is this the way to unite ourselves to God through the mind and through the heart? Is this moving towards the end which the religious life has in view? Is it not rather a march straight along the road towards the hell prepared for the impure? Chastity is, then, indispensable in order to attain to the end at which our condition aims, in order to realize perfection in ourselves." [1]

2. The fight for chastity demands greater effort than the fight for any other virtue; when we weigh, on the one hand, our own weakness, and, on the other, the power of the enemy, we are tempted to cast upon God the whole burden of assuring to us the victory. This would be to desert the battle, to fly before the enemy, the abdication of all personal dignity, and under colour of a false humility. As in the case of

[1] Alvarez de Paz, *De Castitate*, ch. ii.

the other virtues, chastity necessitates on our part a co-operation with grace; and this co-operation consists in a double treatment, in a double medication applied to the body and to the soul.

And first of all, if we wish to remain chaste, how are we to treat the body? As a first means ascetic writers recommend mortification in the use of food; abstinence from what is superfluous, both as to quality and quantity, and that the body should only be supplied with the nourishment necessary to keep up its strength, and to permit of its fulfilling its daily tasks; such is the first rule. And this rule does not only apply to strong men accustomed to every kind of fatigue, and familiarized with every kind of privation, but to the most delicate natures, natures the most enervated by a sensual life. "If you plead," wrote St. Jerome to a Roman lady, "your old habits of luxury; if you say to me that, born as you are of a noble family, you cannot give up a table which has always been served delicately, I reply to you that since you cannot live according to God's law, you must live according to your own. Are we, however, to suppose that God and the Master of all things likes to make you endure hunger, and to see you panting under the pressure of suffering?

Certainly not; but I do not know that there is any other way of saving your chastity." [1]

Alvarez de Paz, quite as much as St. Jerome, urges this work of mortification as a safeguard for chastity: "In the man who mortifies himself in regard to superfluous and delicate nourishment, the fires of passion become extinct. To cast fuel on the flame, and at the same time to pray for the extinction of a fire, is to ask God to work a miracle. To gorge yourself with meat and drink, and then to say in your prayers that you are longing for chastity, is to tempt God, and to ask Him to work a miracle unnecessarily. We do not ask you, as Cassian does, to restrict your diet to an ounce or two of bread and a little water. Such a diet might be sufficient for solitaries, who gave themselves day and night to contemplation, and who made small demands on their bodily strength, but it could not suffice for your weakness, so we say to you: see what you require as regards both the quantity and quality of food to keep up your strength, and to permit of your doing the work which you have got to do; and do not take more than is necessary for those purposes. Daniel was called a man of desires because he abstained from a dish which he coveted, and if you follow his

[1] *Epist. ad Eust.*

example—*i.e.*, if you renounce the delicacies of the table—you will equally merit his glorious title."[1]

To mortification in respect of food, both as regards choice and quantity, must be joined great sobriety. Wine and all strong drinks capable of causing drunkenness must be looked upon as the enemies of chastity. St. Ambrose, again, gives this advice to a widow: "Abstain from wine, in order that you may be able to abstain from all carnal pleasure." Is it only when it disorders our reason that wine is dangerous to virtue? No; but also when, in its use, we exceed the limits of moderation. And even though the evil should stop short at a loss to us of quiet, and should go no further than a recrudescence of temptation, that should be a sufficient reason for imposing on ourselves a severe mortification in respect to that temptation.

Shall we surprise our readers by insisting, moreover, on a careful guard over the senses in order to remain chaste, and especially over that of sight? Who is there who does not know the passage from Jeremiah so frequently quoted: "Death hath entered by our windows," and "my eye hath wasted my soul"?[2] Who, again, is there who does not know the compact Job made with

[1] *De Castitate*, ch. xiv. [2] Lam. iii. 51.

his eyes, "in order," as he said, "not even to think of any woman."[1] "What is this treaty," asks St. Gregory, "and why does Job not treat in preference with the understanding and the imagination? Because he knows that it is through the eyes that bad thoughts enter the heart; and that if he is careful to guard his eyes and the approaches to the senses, he will possess both heart and mind in peace. If, therefore, you desire to keep yourself from all evil thoughts, make, like Job, a treaty with your eyes, and make an agreement with them by which they shall never dare to fix themselves upon aught that is unlawful for you to desire."[2]

The austerities by which we chasten our body after the example of St. Paul, and by which we bring it into subjection are pointed to by ascetic writers as excellent aids to chastity. We cannot press the subject without laying ourselves open to the charge of repeating what we have already said in the chapter on *mortification*. It will be sufficient to recall the fact that the body has need of being treated quite differently from the soul. "The soul must be reasoned with, the body scourged. If you desire to prevent its revolting against the soul, you must deprive it of strength to do so. We do not punish a fugitive slave by death; it

[1] Job xxxi. 1. [2] *Moral.*, book xxi., ch. ii.

would be needless cruelty; we are content with putting him in chains. In the same way we should neither kill the body nor should we weaken it by excessive mortifications; it will be enough to put it in chains with the aid of prudent austerities — austerities which shall, nevertheless, be sufficient to prevent it from wandering in the direction of unlawful things."[1]

3. We must now say a few words regarding the manner in which the soul should be treated.

It is necessary at the outset that the soul should have a rooted conviction that chastity is a gift of God, and that no one can be chaste without grace. "Let us fully realize," says Cassian, "that the favour of a life-long chastity is not bound up with the practice of austerities, however numerous they may be: it is Divine grace which alone is able to create in us such purity. Let each one, therefore, seek by these practices without wearying to obtain from God a pitying look; but let him not hope that austerity will beget in him this spotless chastity, the object of his desires."[2] The testimony of St. John Climacus is not less explicit: "Let no one think," he writes, "that he has attained to chastity by his own personal efforts. It is

[1] Alvarez de Paz, *De Castitate*, ch. xiv.
[2] Coll. xii., ch. iv.

not possible for anyone to conquer his own nature. When nature has been conquered, let us acknowledge that we have enjoyed His intervention Who is above nature."[1]

Alvarez de Paz, whom one never tires of quoting, explains admirably the necessity of grace in such a matter: "It is God," he says, "Who stimulates us to enter on the path of chastity; it is He who gives us strength to make progress therein; and He again Who bears us up to the high places of that virtue, and who guarantees our perseverance. If He left us to ourselves, it would be impossible for us to maintain our footing on those heights; and our weakness would not only prohibit our making any progress along that path, but our even setting foot on it. Let us, then, say with David: 'I set the Lord always in my sight: for He is at my right hand, that I be not moved.'[2] Our hope should be only on Him Who will grant to us the help destined to ensure us the victory."[3]

One of the most copious channels of grace is prayer: it is but logical, therefore, that our conviction of the necessity of grace should be expressed in prayer under the guise of a request both instant and fervent. To realize what grace

[1] Grad. xv. [2] Ps. xv. 8.
[3] *De Castitate*, ch. xv.

can do in the way of acquiring chastity and to neglect to ask for it would be a blameworthy inconsistency : it would show that we took little trouble to act in harmony with our convictions. "Stretch out your arms," cries St. John Climacus, "in the form of the cross, so that the holy sign may win for you victory over the enemy. Cry unto Him Who alone is able to save you ; and banish from your prayer all delicacy or elegance of expression, in order to speak to God with simplicity and humility. Say to Him before everything : 'Have pity upon me because I am feeble,' and then you will experience the virtue of the Most High, and an invisible succour will make you stronger than all your invisible enemies."[1]

In order to remain chaste the use of an extreme circumspection is necessary ; we must be expecting dangers and looking out for snares, never count on past virtue, and never even must we hope that age will erect a barrier between the peril and ourselves. Even when age brings white hairs and a cooling of the passions, we may expect some sudden awakening of concupiscence which will call our virtue in question. "When we are walking on a very slippery path," says Rodriguez, "we are careful

[1] Grad. xv.

to move only step by step, only a little distance at a time; and, even then, the weight of the body and the nature of the ground often carries us farther than we wish. It is the same here; the path is slippery, and the weight of our corrupt nature may easily carry us away. Then, again, chastity is of so delicate a nature, that a mere nothing injures it. It is a precious treasure, which we bear in earthen vessels.[1] If they get broken, all is lost. That is the reason why we must watch over ourselves most attentively, and close all the approaches by which any impurity can find an entrance into our heart."[2]

The wisdom of this rule stands out more clearly still in the light of history when we take into consideration the number of illustrious men who have fallen victims to impurity. We see that it is owing to their having forgotten this rule of prudence that they have fallen; in fact, we find the origin of all these famous downfalls to have been always some slight imprudence—a mere look, a dangerous word, an ambiguous familiarity, seemingly a mere nothing. It was only a spark, but a spark is too often sufficient to light up a terrible conflagration.

To this counsel concerning the necessity of

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 7. [2] *On Chastity*, ch. iii.

being circumspect is allied another given by St. Bonaventure.[1] This Saint tells us that, however slight it may be, we must beware of withholding anything against chastity when making our confession, and of so playing into the hands of the devil. He will not fail to suggest to us that such trifles are not real sins, or that they are only venial sins, and that it is quite unnecessary to accuse ourselves of them. Then he will try to awaken in us some sense of false shame, and to persuade us that an avowal of such a kind will necessarily result in lowering us in our confessor's estimation. Or, if he fears too much lest our conscience should revolt, willing to accept a compromise, he will suggest our so covering up our avowal by reticence, as to hide its true character, and thus render it unintelligible.

We cannot be too much on our guard against such suggestions. To listen or in any way to agree to them would be, first of all, to deprive ourselves of a treasure of great price—viz., peace of heart; further, it would be the first step along a very dangerous path, and instead of living beneath an open sky, instead of permitting our spiritual guide to read our soul as he would read an open book, we should be permitting clouds

[1] *In Specul. Discip.*

to gather between ourselves and him, hiding from him one corner of our soul. For no more than this many souls have been lost.

There is not one ascetic writer who does not recommend that the practice of humility should be associated with that of chastity. "*Qui veut faire l'ange*," writes Pascal, "*fait la bête*." This is his way of translating Our Saviour's words: "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." God takes away His grace from the proud man; and such a one, left to himself, will presently fall, by way of impurity, to the level of brute beasts. Humility, on the contrary, invites chastity into the soul. St. John Climacus calls her the mother of chastity, and adds: "Anyone wishing to conquer the spirit of impurity by indulging it to satiety is like a man who attempts to extinguish fire by pouring oil upon it. But he who thinks he can succeed against this same enemy by mortification is like a man who, having fallen into the sea, attempts to save himself by swimming with only one hand. To mortification, therefore, join humility, for without humility, mortification would remain powerless." [1]

Meditation on the Passion of the Saviour may

[1] Grad. xv.

be regarded as an excellent remedy for the sin of impurity—a remedy which forestalls the birth of evil thoughts, or drives them quickly away from the soul if ever they happen to slip in; it also extinguishes the fire of concupiscence. "There is no remedy," writes St. Augustine, "more powerful against impurity than the thought of the Saviour's death; and I have never found anything more efficacious in everything than the wounds of Jesus Christ. It is there that I sleep securely and tranquilly, and thence I draw new life."[1] It is also the remedy which St. Bernard recommends to us: "Whenever you are battling with any temptation to impurity, call to mind the Passion of the Saviour of the world, and say to yourself, 'My God hangs upon the cross, while I give myself up to criminal voluptuousness.'"[2]

The author of the *Spiritual Combat* condemns certain meditations advised, however, by many books as being remedies for temptation to impurity. He does not approve of the soul staying to fathom the degradation which attaches to the impure vice, the impossibility of satiating it, the disgust which it calls forth, the bitterness which it engenders, or the ruin which it brings to

[1] *Manuale*, ch. xxiii.
[2] *In Sermon. Hon. Vitæ.*

fortune, life, honour, and other similar things Such subjects are little likely to help in bringing about the cure, besides proving possibly dangerous, and conjuring up again those very imaginations which the soul should do all she can to forget. "Seek rather the subject of your meditations," he says, "in the life and Passion of our crucified Lord. As soon as you begin to apprehend, I do not say evil thoughts, but even the first sign of such a thought, fly at once for refuge to the Crucified, and say to Him: 'My Jesus, my sweet Jesus, help me speedily that I fall not into the hands of the enemy.'

"Sometimes, also, while embracing the Cross on which your Saviour hangs, kiss the wounds in His sacred feet again and again, and say lovingly: 'O wounds so beautiful, wounds chaste and holy, wound now this impure and miserable heart, and do not permit it to offend you.'

"And if bad thoughts persist in coming into your mind in spite of you, do not be afraid, do not give up the meditation; beware of turning your mind towards them even to offer them resistance, but fix it with all possible attention on the subject of your meditation, and do not trouble any more about them than if they were not yours at all. There is no better way of

resisting them, even when their assaults leave you no repose."[1]

I should reproach myself if I omitted to point out one further remedy to such souls as are tormented by impure temptations—viz., devotion to the most holy Virgin. These souls will find in her, whom the piety of the faithful has recognized as pre-eminently the Virgin—the Mother most pure and most chaste—a powerful aid in guarding their chastity. If, indeed, there are, more than others, any graces which Mary loves to distribute, they are those of chastity ; and surely it is well to remind her of the favour of her own Immaculate Conception, in order that we may have our part in that distribution. There is no director of souls, no confessor, who has not had evidence of the miracles of purity wrought in souls by the invocation of Mary under her title of Immaculate.

Article III.—On Mortification Through Obedience.

1. Mortification may be regarded in the light of a sacrifice which man offers to God, and in which man is himself both priest and victim. Through the virtue of poverty he immolates his

[1] *Spiritual Combat,* ch. xix.

exterior possessions to God; through chastity he immolates his body; through obedience he completes the sacrifice and gives to God everything which remains to him—the two things most precious to him—viz., his mind and his will. The sacrifice is then entire and without reserve; it may be termed a holocaust, because the entire victim has been consumed in God's honour.

It is under this last aspect that we have to consider mortification; and it is to the form of obedience peculiar to the religious life, obedience sealed by a vow of religion that we will limit our consideration.

If we ask the reason why obedience is of the number of those dispositions necessary to the Mystical Life, the author of the *Imitation* will answer the question for us: "He who flees from obedience flees from grace." To this maxim there is no exception; it must be taken in its absolute sense. It seems, nevertheless, that the writer has here in view grace in its most exalted form. The theory of Christian obedience applies above all to such as aspire to perfection: it is, then, to the grace which is the most powerful factor in a soul's perfection, to the grace of the Mystical Life, which, in a quite especial manner, the saying of the *Imitation* applies. In propor-

tion, therefore, as we shun obedience, do we withdraw ourselves from that grace.

We might consider the solution attained, but we think it better to throw some even stronger light on the subject, by showing in what manner obedience prepares the soul so that the Mystical Life can germinate therein. As we have already shown above, obedience is only Christian and supernatural on condition that the superior is looked upon as representing God, in a sense an incarnation of God. What is to obey in a Christian manner if not an abandonment to God of the direction of our being—a making of ourselves passive in His hands? The special characteristic of mystical prayer, on the other hand, is passivity: in the mystical state the soul ceases to use its powers, as in everyday life it needs must do; it submits rather to the activity of God. So that it is easily seen how well disposed for the Mystical Life are such souls as are accustomed to the virtue of obedience—*i.e.*, who are accustomed to making themselves passive in the hands of God's representative. It is easily seen how wonderfully every act of this virtue increases the soul's disposition towards passivity, rendering it at the same time more supple and more malleable in the hands of God.

St. Thomas puts the vow of obedience above

the two other vows of religion, and gives the following reasons: "Through the vow of obedience man offers his will to God; while through that of chastity he offers to Him only the sacrifice of his body; and through that of poverty he only sacrifices to Him his exterior goods. As the body is by nature higher than exterior goods, the vow of chastity is more perfect than the vow of poverty. But the soul being higher than the body, the vow of obedience must be regarded as the most excellent of the three. Secondly, it is through the will that man makes use of his body and of his exterior possessions; so that in giving his will, he gives all the rest. The vow of obedience has, then, a wider reach than either of the other two vows, and in a certain sense it contains within itself both of the others."[1]

In another place,[2] St. Thomas teaches that obedience is the virtue most necessary to the religious state—the foundation upon which all religious life should be laid. To abolish obedience would mean the permission to each member of a community to live as he pleases, without rule and without law; it would mean the creation of anarchy amongst persons whose

[1] Opuscul. xviii., book ii.
[2] 2, 2, quæst. 186, art. iv.

very existence should consist of respect for authority and for the hierarchy. The unity of that organism which we call a community, and its cohesion, would then begin to crumble disastrously and disappear, and an isolation of members one from another would take its place. Such, moreover, is the fate reserved for any organism whose members venture to dispense with a central controlling force—the head which directs.

Another requisite for religious houses is the reign therein of peace and concord. Now it is obedience which creates both peace and concord, and it is obedience which alone can preserve these two blessings in a religious house. "Just as a town is in peace," says Richelieu,[1] "as long as the orders of the governor are obeyed there, so peace reigns in that monastery where the will of the superior is respected. Woe to him who thwarts that will! Woe to him who opposes or hates it!"

"If," says Alvarez de Paz—"if you desire to live in peace in the religious life, you must be in the hands of your superior like a piece of cloth in those of a tailor. The latter cuts the cloth before him as he requires it; he takes one part to make a garment therewith; he reserves another

[1] *De Vita et Fine Solit.*, art. ult.

for later on, and for another purpose. From the part which he wants to use at once he cuts out that which is to be the collar, and that which is to be the cuffs. In the same way a superior makes use of those under him, assigning to some important ministries, to others minor functions. He who offers no opposition lives in peace, while he who shakes off the yoke of obedience troubles both his own peace and that of those around him. 'Hath not the potter,' demands St. Paul,[1] 'power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?'

"I would draw attention to the fact that there is one great difference between the potter to whom St. Paul alludes and the religious superior. The former may destine the vessels which he manufactures to uses which are little honourable. The functions which are confided by a superior to his religious are, on the contrary, always most honourable. For is there anything in the religious state which is not as glorious as the most coveted earthly offices? Then in our life are not the humblest offices the safest? There are fewer dangers, and there is less exposure to the many gusts of pride. We may then consider it proved that the peace of

[1] Rom. ix. 21.

a monastery is founded on obedience, and that to resist the orders of a superior is to compromise that peace, not only for oneself but for all around one." [1]

2. But in propounding as the foundation for obedience the respect which should be shown for a vow of a voluntary character, or the necessity of living at peace both with ourselves and with those around us, are we setting forth the entire truth? All this is very true, but is it not only a portion of the truth? Yes, obedience has in fact a more solid foundation; its roots penetrate even farther down still; and it is to this foundation, to the subsoil to which the roots penetrate, that we must dig down in order to reach the true doctrine concerning this virtue.

The superior takes the place of Jesus Christ, so that in rendering obedience to him it is not a man whom we obey, but God Himself. Here we see the formula of Christian obedience, and the reason which makes its practice so easy and so acceptable.

"People are astonished," says Rodriguez, "that a religious, after having lived under obedience every day and for many years, may not possess the virtue of obedience; it is astonishing, in-

[1] *De Obed.*, ch. iii.

deed, since both philosophers and theologians seem to teach that virtues are acquired by frequent practice. To this we reply that the habit of virtues is acquired by acts which must be agreeable to that virtue which it is desired to acquire; and the obedience which we have in view is a religious virtue, or, as theologians express it, it is one of those virtues which, having God, and the worship of God for their object, make up the virtue of religion. Now the religious in question has failed to regard the superior whom he has obeyed as God Himself, nor has the accomplishment of God's will been his primary object. What he has wanted is to keep his superior in a contented frame of mind, to win his esteem, or to avoid reprimand. Or, again, he obeyed because the orders given fitted in with his own inclination, or because he was kindly treated, or for some similar motive. This is why mere acts of obedience are not acts of religious obedience, the reason being because they have not the essential form which alone can give the character, and why the religious of whom we are speaking has not acquired the virtue of obedience, and never will do so, unless his motive be altered. He may, perhaps, acquire a certain obedience of a natural order such as soldiers render to their general, a ship's crew towards

the pilot, or such as would be rendered by any other community of men towards its chief, but this obedience will never be a true virtue of religion."[1]

St. Ignatius, again, recommends his religious to obey their superior not on account of his prudence or kindness, or any other good quality, but because he stands to them in the place of God. "If," said he, "you lose sight of this motive, which is one of faith, and allow your minds to dwell on other motives purely human, religious obedience will be impossible for you. There will then be nothing religious in the obedience, because even in the world you would similarly follow the counsels of a wise and experienced man.[2]

"Let us then accustom ourselves," says Alvarez de Paz, "to obey our superior as we should obey Jesus Christ, and this practice will lead us to the very root of obedience, and we shall experience therein a beneficent peace. If we are, indeed, imbued with this thought—viz., that it is not a man we are obeying but Jesus Christ—we shall be happy to obey, and we shall find it extremely easy to do so. Surely obedience to Jesus Christ must be both easy

[1] *De Obedientiâ*, ch. xii.
[2] *Life*, book v., ch. iv.

and pleasant. If, O religious, thou renderest obedience to thy superior as to a man, if thou seest in him only a man, thou wilt have difficulties without number to contend with. Thou wilt have a thousand apparent reasons for doubting whether the orders of this superior are always very wise. The thought will at once come to thee that he is blinded by passion, carried away with anger, or dominated by irregulated affections. But as soon as thou hast seen in him Christ Himself, all these tiresome notions will die away, and thou wilt experience a great joy in thine obedience. Obedience as thus understood appeared so excellent to St. Bonaventure that he places it higher than obedience rendered to Jesus Christ if He should give us the order Himself without any intermediary; and further on, after praising the obedience which we render to God—Creator and Redeemer—he adds, 'We must esteem as higher than this obedience, that which we render to a wise man of well-balanced mind in whom we see the representative of God. But still higher again is obedience which we render to a man of small parts and trying character; a man of imperious temper, and one who knows neither calmness nor reflection: and who can doubt that when rendered under these circumstances, obedience

implies a more perfect faith, and exacts greater energy.'"[1]

In the following fine passage Alvarez de Paz shows himself a worthy disciple of St. Ignatius, who might be called the saint of obedience, and who says to his religious: "Whoever may be your superior, revere in him the Divine Majesty, and render to him the perfect obedience of religion."[2]

This theory of Christian obedience should not only be impressed on the minds of inferiors, it is still more necessary for superiors. It is owing to their having forgotten it, owing to their having wished to govern chiefly by the aid of human means, that we are too often witnesses of that feebleness and instability of government which results in a loss to it of all prestige, and reduces it to a state of ineffectualness. The superior's faith and that of his subordinates are conjointly responsible up to a certain point; they mutually appeal to and sustain one another. But for the superiors it is before all things necessary that they should have faith in their own mission; and that, while thoroughly recognizing that they are nothing in themselves, they should claim obedience in the name of God

[1] *De Obedientiâ*, ch. ii.
[2] *Epist.* xxix., *Ad Conimbr.*

Whose living representatives they are. But should any superior, in the exercise of his authority, allow his own personality to show up too clearly, should he fail to be sufficiently mindful of his Divine mission, then the duty of those under him is to refuse to judge him; their duty is to look beyond the man in order to discern God, and, however much nature may resist, to persevere in fixing the mind stedfastly on that representation of the Divine.

When one has got to the root of Christian obedience it is easier to see why God takes the cause of superiors so vigorously in hand, and why He punishes their calumniators so severely. If the religious who permit themselves to criticize and satirize authority, and who, without scruple, make cutting remarks about their superiors, only knew to what a loss of grace they were exposing themselves, and what a store of punishment they were thus incurring, they would learn both to have more control of the tongue, and how to make better use of their minds. Let them call to mind God's punishment of those who in days gone by murmured against Moses and Aaron; and if the earth to-day no longer opens her mouth to swallow up the murmurers, it does not mean that God's arm is shortened: God has at His disposal

other ways of avenging wrong, and He will punish them when He pleases. Concerning this point St. Thomas remarks[1] that God punished those who had murmured against their chiefs more severely than those who offended Him directly by worshipping the golden calf. By this difference in the punishments St. Thomas draws the conclusion that God wishes to give us an illustration of His own resentment of insults offered to those who are His representatives.

3. There is much diversity in the classification of the degrees of religious obedience given by ascetic writers. We will pause at that given by St. Ignatius.

In his constitutions he says that the first degree of obedience consists in the outward performance of that which is commanded us.

In the following lines will be found in substance the practical counsels which Alvarez de Paz gives in order to facilitate obedience in this first form.

First of all, however fruitful a certain ministry may be in its results, however fine the successful accomplishment of a certain piece of work may appear, we may not exercise that ministry or undertake that work except as an act of

[1] 2, 2, quæst. 93, art. ii.

obedience ; we must set aside all other motives and let ourselves be guided solely by obedience. Also, when any work is confided to us to do, we must do it with all our might, so that we may do it well ; but we must at the same time only lend ourselves to the task, we must not identify ourselves with it, or regard it as being an essential part of our existence. So that when we are called upon to give up anything we are doing, we should feel none of those heartbreaking disappointments which often so greatly try our spirit of obedience, and we must also be ready to turn to wherever the command of our superior may call us without resistance, and without murmur. " Be ever master of yourself," said St. Bonaventure, " and allow no one empire over your heart save only God, or your superior, for God's sake. Any outward ministry you perform should sit so lightly on your affections that your superior may never feel any anxiety on your account ; and give your life up so entirely to his direction that, at a word from him, you may give up anything you are doing without difficulty and without murmur. If you act otherwise your obedience will possess very little merit. Impatience, or murmuring, or importunity, would mark you out as a robber and a murderer—a

robber, because you would be taking that which is not yours, viz., your liberty; a murderer, because, by bad example, you would be the cause of death to simple souls."[1]

To obey promptly and with ease presupposes a heart detached from all exterior things, and it is this detachment which is the first thing which a man must seek to bring about; without it obedience, even in its least exalted degree, could not exist. One single word from Our Lord, one look only, was, in days gone by, sufficient to make the Apostles forsake everything in order to follow Him. But what virtue that single word, and that single look, must have contained! A virtue of detachment. In order to make them follow Him so promptly Our Lord must have severed the ties which bound the hearts of those Apostles, and have freed them from everything which they had previously cared for—their ships, their nets, their families, etc. When a man has reached this freedom, one sees that obedience becomes easy; but until he has reached it, its practice is impossible.

This detachment is so necessary that it admits of no exception, not even in favour of superiors; and that even in their case we must be on our guard lest our affection for them should become

[1] *Tract. de Inter. Hom.*, part i., ch. iv.

excessive. It is, indeed, a good thing to look well to the future ; for, to a superior of whom we have been too fond, and to whose method of government we have also grown too partial, may succeed another who may be less sympathetic to us, and whose ways are different ; then comes the temptation to misconstrue everything which comes from him, and to suspect everything he does, and to offer him a blind opposition. It is wise, then, to beware of all infatuation regarding superiors. This freedom which we retain towards them will make our obedience both more meritorious and easier. The orders which they give will find us always respectful, and when a change of superiors brings with it a change of methods, we shall be neither troubled nor shall we take offence at the difference we shall notice in the successive modes of government.

4. According to St. Ignatius the second degree of obedience consists in conforming our will to that of the superior, in willing everything which he wills. It is no longer a question of a simple execution of the orders of a superior, or of obedience regulating our outward life. In the second degree, obedience passes beyond this and penetrates to the soul in order to regulate our interior activity : and it is the will which it first of all seeks to influence.

"Obedience," says St. John Climacus, "is the grave wherein our self-will is buried."[1] A religious, then, is a man who by his vow of obedience has buried his own will in the grave, and in its place has taken to himself the will of his superiors.

A good religious, also, is troubled when he is told to do anything the performance of which gives him pleasure—he feels, then, distrust of himself and of the purity of his obedience; while if that which he is ordered to do is repugnant to him, he rejoices and feels assured that it is not his own will that he is going to do, but the will of God. It is, indeed, difficult to be quite sure that we are working only for God when the action is one which gives pleasure to ourselves, and when we have only to follow our natural bent. But when what we have to do is against the grain and requires violent effort, we are quite safe in judging that the obedience is free from all self-interest.

According to this rule what shall we say of the religious who wishes to do nothing but what is pleasing to himself, or who strives to get his superior always to command him to do that which he desires to do? What is his position with regard to the virtue of obedience? "Whoever," says St. Bernard, "is guilty of

[1] Grad. iv., art. iii.

manœuvring, whether openly or indirectly, so that his superior shall order him to do that which falls in with his own inclinations, is greatly deluded if he flatters himself that he possesses the virtue of obedience. It is not he, but rather his superior, who then obeys."[1]

5. The third degree of obedience consists in conforming our judgment to that of our superior. One may will everything which the superior wills, and do exactly what we have been told to do, without for all that renouncing our independence of judgment, and while reserving to ourselves the liberty of expressing an opinion on either the wisdom or expediency of his orders. There remains, then, over and above the freedom of the will a yet further sacrifice to be made; and in order that the holocaust may be complete, the sacrifice must extend to the intellect. If this be not done a man might take up a position intrenched behind this interior tribunal, and would only be giving a part of himself, keeping back that part which he most values—viz., his judgment. It was this which caused St. Ignatius to say that those who submit their will to that of their superior, but not their judgment, have only got one foot in religion.[2]

[1] *Sermo. de Trib. Ord. Eccles.*
[2] Cited by Rodriguez, *On Obedience*, ch. v.

It is written in the book of Proverbs : " Lean not unto thine own understanding."[1] Such is the wise advice which a religious should give to himself when he is tempted to criticize an order of his superior, and such is the wise distrust of himself which he should put into practice. What errors, what gross errors, we have already made! How often have we felt so certain that we were right that we prophesied certain results, while events themselves have rudely proved the contrary! To suspend our judgment when it differs from that of our superior is, then, the act of a wise man—it means a true self-knowledge ; it is also a way of avoiding grave mistakes in the future.

In temptations of this kind we must also remember that we are not in a good position to judge. We are interested persons ; now an order which affects us personally always runs a great risk of being unfavourably criticized if it is ever so little disagreeable to us. But we should look at things quite differently if we were not concerned in the matter, and our minds would be entirely free to judge the question in the abstract. But directly we become personally interested our judgment becomes completely warped. Only a world-wide experience was expressed by

[1] Prov. iii. 5.

St. Ambrose when he said that "the eye which is under the influence of passion no longer sees aright."[1] This truth has become a commonplace of morality. Whenever we feel the spirit of opposition arising, let us stop and consider our own position as regards our superior. He is the head, and we are only one of the members of the body. It is the head which has the qualifications for directing, and we must believe that God is not sparing to that head in His gift of wisdom. The head sees things from a more lofty eminence than we do, and is able to grasp the position from points of view which are often hidden from us. To criticize a decision of authority is very often to be like a soldier whose vision is limited to a corner of the battlefield, but who, nevertheless, permits himself to criticize his general's plan of campaign.

These reasons, it appears to me, are sufficient to inspire us with a legitimate distrust of our own judgment, together with great reserve when it is a question of criticizing the acts of those in authority. Borrowed from the natural order, these reasons are sufficient to bring about a common form of obedience such as is customary with ordinary Christians, but they would be powerless to produce obedience in its exalted

[1] 1. *De Bona Morte.*

form, such as should be practised by the religious. In fact, the obedience of the religious should be blind, and all the reasons of the natural order put together will be insufficient to inspire the practice of this obedience.

6. What is blind obedience? St. Ignatius will tell us. "Imperfect obedience," says he, "has two eyes, but this is its misfortune; perfect obedience is blind, but it is in this very blindness that consist both its wisdom and its perfection. The former questions every direction given to it, the latter obeys without a thought. The former is never quite indifferent to any order given, the latter resembles the beam of the scales, dipping to neither side, but equally disposed to any command which may be given to it. The former obeys outwardly by carrying out that which it is ordered to do; but it disobeys inwardly inasmuch as it resists in spirit, so that it does not deserve the name of obedience. The latter does not content itself with merely carrying out the orders given to it; but further submits both its judgment and its will to the will and judgment of the superior. In a word, it obeys for the sole reason that it is commanded to do so, and because to obey thus is to obey blindly."[1]

[1] *Letter on Obedience.*

Does this mean, as certain opponents have insidiously explained, that the religious must voluntarily blind himself to the point of losing his sense of right and wrong, to the point of being absolutely passive in the hands of anyone who would make of him an instrument of crime? There is an important reservation made by all those who have praised the excellence of blind obedience which destroys this false insinuation. Dishonesty is careful to forget this reservation, it finds it more convenient to slander the doctrine by perverting it, and by laying stress only on one of its aspects. In order to put an end to such a foolish calumny it will be sufficient to quote St. Ignatius, whose teaching on this point has had the honour of being the object of an especially violent attack. In his *Constitutions* [1] the Saint says clearly that in matters where nothing of sin appears we should obey blindly, always taking it for granted that what we are ordered to do is conformable to the will of God. But it would, according to him, be a dangerous error to believe that obedience should continue to be blind when we are commanded to do things which offend our conscience. The superior who issues such orders would no longer be God's representative, and would at

[1] Ch. i., para. 23.

once cease to have the right to our obedience. Obedience may be truly blind in regard to this particular matter, and yet may refuse to ignore the legitimate protests of conscience ; in presence, however, of commands good or immaterial, this virtue refuses to sit in judgment on the commands given to her, but bends low before them, for she knows that the authority which imposes them is for her the ultimate tribunal. So far, then, obedience must go in order to be both perfect and truly religious : and where is the morality, however severe, which could find any fault with the theory of religious obedience thus defined ?

CHAPTER VII

HOW THE SOUL PASSES FROM THE ORDINARY SPIRITUAL LIFE TO THE MYSTICAL LIFE

Before reaching the level of the Mystical Life, the soul passes commonly by way of a state of prayer which many spiritual writers have described under the name of *the prayer of simplicity*, or *of simple advertence*, or *of loving attention to God present:* this is a first stage.

Then, when God judges the time to be opportune, this prayer becomes modified. A new element is introduced, an element which removes from the prayer of simplicity its consoling nature and transforms it into that *night of the senses* so well described by St. John of the Cross : this is the last stage passed previous to entering into the mystical city ; thence the first glimpse of its outlines, still dim and indistinct, can be seen in the distance. Or if you like, it is as the vestibule of the Mystical Life, and through the chinks in its walls a few rays of the new light are already finding their way.

In order to justify the title given to this work it is necessary for us briefly to describe these two intermediate states. They constitute the immediate preparation for the mystical state. The soul has then realized the dispositions most favourable for determining God to incline towards it and to introduce it into a new world.

1. The prayer of simple advertence which first claims our attention is the state of which both St. Francis de Sales and the first historians of the "Visitation" often speak, the state of prayer which they ascertained at the outset to be that of nearly all the religious of that order. Does that mean that a certain number of them mounted no higher—viz., to the true mystical prayer, the prayer of quiet? No, certainly not; it only means that the greater part of them had already reached the threshold, the neighbourhood, as it were, of the Mystical Life.

There is a serious difference of opinion among spiritual writers in regard to the prayer of simple advertence. Some regard it as a simple variety of affective prayer—in fact, as affective prayer itself under its form of *quiet*. Others would make it still more important, and insist that it is a higher degree of mental prayer. The former are, perhaps, right in theory; for it is not easy to find any specific character dis-

tinguishing the prayer of simple advertence from affective prayer. Looking at the matter from the point of view of pure reason, there is, perhaps, no occasion for assigning to the state of prayer which we are considering any place apart from, or above, affective prayer. But it seems that in practice this classification may be justified ; for souls will better understand the prayer of simple advertence if they see in it a new state of prayer ; they will value it more highly in virtue of this fact, and will conceive a more ardent desire to practise this new ascent towards God.

The difficulty is clearly to specify wherein the prayer of simple advertence differs from affective prayer. If it is desired to compare the two states, and further to condense the differences which separate them into a formula, it can be put in this way—viz., affective prayer to a large extent suppresses multiplicity of reflections, but retains multiplicity of *affections* and of *subjects* for meditation. In the prayer of simple advertence a further simplification takes place : the affections become fewer and the object of the affections is God apprehended under a form which hardly ever varies. But we must beware of thinking that such a change takes place abruptly—all in a moment : it is the result of a slow and uninterrupted work of grace

which effects the transformation of affective prayer in a soul, and gives it little by little the physiognomy of the prayer of simple advertence.

In order rightly to understand the above formula, it must be remembered that in affective prayer reasonings and reflections have almost entirely ceased in order to give place to the affections, but these affections do not all assume the form: this prayer is able to express every sentiment—every shade of sentiment—which a living soul can experience, and it is this very variety which then nourishes and sustains affection. To keep the mind glued to one single sentiment for half an hour, to refuse to express any other than this sentiment, or to express it in any other terms, would be to kill affection, and at the same time to open the door to interminable distractions. The attention itself can only be sustained thanks to the variety of affections under expression. And further, in affective prayer, the sentiments may have as objects the diverse aspects of the Divine nature, the different attributes of that nature, or all the mysteries in which God has revealed Himself to us. A soul engaged in affective prayer may, then, take the same subjects which it used to take when it made its ordinary meditation. The whole difference will lie in the

manner in which these subjects are treated. Yesterday it was the understanding which was principally brought into play, the soul reasoning a great deal, and exercising much reflection before hazarding an affection ; to-day it lingers less on its reasonings and reflections, and hastens to pass on to acts of affection. The subjects, however, remain the same ; and in these two inferior states of prayer, the variety of subjects is not only counselled, but is necessary. Neither in simple meditation any more than in affective prayer is it possible to fix the mind for any length of time —say many months—on the same subject.

But take the case of a soul who, from affective prayer, has been raised little by little, and by the uninterrupted action of grace, as we said above, to the prayer of simple advertence. Has any considerable modification taken place in its prayer ? Yes ; the multiplicity of affections have disappeared in order to give place to one single sentiment, to an attentiveness full of love for God realized as present : hence the name of the prayer of *loving attention to God present* given by some writers to this condition of the soul. Besides, the soul ceases to pass any more from one subject to another ; the object of her prayer is no longer manifold as it was formerly, and unity still reigns here. The object of the

prayer is "God as He exists in Himself, and not limited by any fixed idea, or apprehended in any particular form. Should the mind be drawn to tarry on any other aspect of God, the prayer would no longer be that of simple advertence."[1]

2. If we wish to analyze this prayer, in order to learn its structure, we see that three of our faculties co-operate in its production—viz., the intelligence, the memory, and the will. Let us state briefly the several parts which each of these faculties takes.

The intelligence believes in and contemplates God present. It is an act of faith because sight is not possible; nevertheless, faith's certainty is as sure as sight itself. But the act of faith has not the same form which it had of old. The soul no longer says to God, "I believe that Thou art present." She has said so so often, and she herself is so strongly impregnated with His presence, that it is quite unnecessary to go on repeating it. She goes straight to the point and contemplates Him present to her. She contemplates Him simply without waiting to make any profession of her faith. And this simple look is equivalent to the highest act of faith.

Memory recalls the presence of God in a real manner. Who is there who does not know this

[1] Courbon, *Instr. sur l'Oraison*, part iii., inst. 1.

doctrine of the presence of God both in us and round about us ? But how rare are those who habitually recollect His presence, or on whom this remembrance has any practical influence! Well, if you look into a soul raised to the prayer which we have under consideration, you will find there the thought of God under the form of a habit, or, if you like so to express it, of a natural inclination.

What part does the will play ? It consists in giving warmth to the gaze and to the thought of God present. It is quite possible, indeed, to look towards God, and to think of Him without any sense of love, and without any interior movement of the affections, after the manner of the philosopher who studies God coldly and contemplates Him only with his intelligence. But in the prayer of which we are speaking the will intervenes in order to mingle love with the contemplation, thus raising the soul's gaze to the moral plane, and giving to it a supernatural value, without which it would be one only of speculation.

Is it necessary in this prayer to consider God as dwelling within us rather than outside us ? Certainly not. Each one should act on this point as grace moves him. The manner in which we dwell on the presence of God matters little.

In one of her letters to Bossuet, Madame de Maisonfort thus describes her manner of prayer: "I should find a difficulty in saying exactly what form my prayer takes, other than that it is a simple remembrance of God, or attention to God, without anything distinct about it, without representing Him to myself in any special place, and without even seeking Him within me."[1] And Bossuet reassured her as to the legitimacy of such a prayer. "What you write," he replied, "is sufficient for your prayer."[2]

3. Bossuet, in another letter, affirms the legitimacy of the prayer of simple advertence, and distinguishes it in the following terms from mystical prayer: "I am fully persuaded that by contenting ourselves with a wordless act of faith —*i.e.*, by simply realizing to ourselves our belief in God and in His presence, an act which of its nature neither requires to be set forth in words, nor to be led up to and enlarged upon by reasoning—we may in prayer at times cease from intellectual effort, even while to persist in making such effort is still in our power.

"I do not wish to assert that we then have reached that state of prayer which St. John of the Cross calls passive; but be that as it may, it is legitimate, and in conformity with the

[1] Letter No. 1. [2] Answer viii.

doctrine of St. Paul, who, if we desire certitude in those things which do not appear, demands not intellectual effort, but faith only. When, therefore, I find a Christian who, in this sort of prayer, though still able to make intellectual efforts, and though perfectly conscious that he is able to make them, nevertheless, abstains from doing so, I have no fault to find. Let him live by faith, and possess his soul in peace."

(3. Dans une autre lettre, Bossuet affirmait la légitimité de l'oraison de simple regard, et la distinguait en ces termes de l'oraison mystique : " Je suis bien persuadé qu'en se livrant à la seule foi qui, de sa nature, n'est pas discursive ni raisonneuse, on peut faire cesser le discours sans être dans l'impuissance d'en faire.

" Je ne veux pas assurer qu'on soit alors dans l'état d'oraison passive, ainsi que l'appelle Saint-Jean de la Croix ; mais quoi qu'il en soit, cet état est bon et conforme à la doctrine de Saint-Paul qui ne démande pas le discours, mais la seule foi pour la conviction des choses qui ne paraissent pas. Quand donc je trouve un chrétien qui, sans être dans cette impuissance de discours, ou sans songer qu'il y est, priera sans discours, je n'aurai rien à lui dire sinon qu'il croie et vive en paix."[1]*)*

[1] *First Letter to Mme. de Maisonfort.*

In his *Treatise on the love of God*, St. Francis de Sales praises the excellency of the prayer of simple advertence. He speaks of it by the name of "contemplation"; but there is not the least doubt as to what the Saint has in his mind, for it is evident that the condition of which he speaks is certainly that which we have described under the name of "prayer of simple advertence": "Meditation," he says, "is as if one should smell one after another, and separately, the carnation, rose, rosemary, thyme, jessamine, and orange-flower; but contemplation is as if one smelt an essence made out of all these flowers combined. For this latter takes up all these odours united into a single sentiment which the former had experienced separately and divided; and there is no doubt that that single odour which results from the mixture of all the perfumes is in itself alone sweeter and more precious than the perfumes of which it is composed, inhaled separately, one after the other. Hence the reason why the Divine Spouse values so highly the gaze *of a single eye:* and what is this gaze of a single eye directed towards the spouse if not to see Him with one simple and attentive look without any striving to repeat it? Oh, how thrice happy are those who, after having gone over in their minds the many motives there are for loving

God, by concentrating all the efforts of the eye in a single glance, and all their thoughts on a single issue, arrive at length at the unity of contemplation."[1]

4. At this point a grave difficulty causes us to hesitate. We have said that the object of the simple look is God just as He exists in Himself, without any fixed idea, and under no particular form. Does not this exclude the Sacred Humanity of the Saviour from this prayer? Is it not a tacit admission that this Humanity is not the lawful object of the simple look?

In order to solve that difficulty I would remind you that there are three distinct methods of thinking of Our Lord. In the first place we may let the mind dwell on one of the mysteries of His life or of His passion. Secondly, we may, by the aid of the imagination, try and imagine Our Lord as He was when on earth, or as He now is in Heaven, and adore Him under that form. Lastly, we may think simply of Jesus Christ, without calling up any particular image, or without representing Him to ourselves in a distinct manner under any of the aspects of His mortal life, or in the glory of His present life, but welcoming with affection any thought which His name may awaken in us.

[1] Book vi., ch. v.

It is evident that neither of the first two methods of thinking of Our Lord have anything in common with the prayer of simple advertence. But surely the third reproduces to perfection the procedure of that prayer! For is it not itself a simple look? And if we remember that the humanity of Our Lord is the most certain and the most rapid way of approaching God, we should cease to have any fear lest, in thinking of that humanity, we could be receding from God. On the contrary, we should find that thought to be the surest method both of sustaining that loving attention in all its fervour, and of reviving it when it wavers.

5. No one would think of denying the excellence of the prayer of simple advertence. But is that prayer within the reach of all? Are all able to profit by its immense advantages? The answer to this question is different from that which we should have to give were it a case merely of ordinary meditation. Anyone can meditate, and the practice of meditation can be recommended to all. But of the prayer of simple advertence the same cannot be said. Even though it is within the confines of ordinary prayer, and though it is not mystic, its practice is only possible to a rather limited number of souls. God, if He wished so to do, could of

course create it in a soul in an instant—*i.e.*, He would enable a soul to cover the distance which separates the simple state of grace from that relatively exalted state in a single bound, but that would be an exception, and here we are not dealing with exceptions. As a general rule that prayer necessitates a long preparation, and we must not think that it is within the reach of all without distinction: in order for it to become acclimatized in a soul, certain dispositions must be found there, and these dispositions are rather rarely met with.

Prudence demands that in such a matter recourse should be had to the light which a confessor—alike discreet and learned—can bring to our aid. We are bad judges of our own case; and, left to ourselves, we run the risk through faint-heartedness of remaining only at the threshold of this prayer, even when our right of entry is well established; or of compromising all by our haste in entering before the time has arrived. It is, then, to the confessor that belongs the task of stimulating our sluggishness or of moderating our impulsiveness; it is for him to decide in the last resort all such thorny questions. But we must not lose sight of the fact that it is only a confessor at once discreet and learned in such matters

that we want. A confessor who is sceptical about such states of prayer, or who scoffs at them; or one who remains systematically ignorant of them, would be a guide more harmful than useful.

And what are the special points to which the confessor should direct his attention? Firstly, he should find out to what degree of virtue a soul has attained. Has it the dispositions which we have described in the preceding chapters? Does it practise that virtue in the form and to the extent which we have laid down? If it has carried out in its principal lines the plan which we have drawn, it has done all that is necessary in order to gain access to this state of prayer. It may be that God has other intentions for it, and that He desires to keep it longer, even perhaps all its life, in the way of ordinary meditation. But that soul has done its best, it has overcome the obstacles in the way, and grace will work in it when God judges the moment opportune. If, on the contrary, that soul has not yet overcome its tepidity, if a dread of efforts, and of difficulties and of mortification in all its forms reveals itself in all its relations with God, it is to be feared that it is not yet ripe for the prayer of simple advertence; and the confessor, far from pushing it on,

should encourage it to confine itself humbly to the less exalted prayer.

Is human knowledge a required condition of this prayer? Certainly not. It is not an obstacle, as certain writers seem to insinuate—writers who dwell complacently upon those words of Our Lord: "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones."[1] It is knowledge of a worldly nature which Jesus has here in view, the knowledge which is not tempered with humility, which He declares to be incompatible with a revelation of the heavenly secret. But true learning, that which in a soul is joined to Christian simplicity, far from being an obstacle to an elevated form of prayer, is, on the contrary, an excellent preparation for it. We would state very clearly, nevertheless, that such a preparation is not indispensable, and that complete ignorance of all human learning would in no sense incapacitate a man from acquiring the knowledge of God. "It is a mistake," says Courbon, "to think that village folk, artisans, or working men, must of necessity be excluded from the most sublime states of the interior life. I am so fully persuaded to the contrary by my

[1] St. Matt. xi. 25.

experience among them that I wish I was able to preach this truth in every village and in every shop—in fact, in every place where persons of this condition in life are to be met with, and who are persons of good will. I would tell them that it depended only on themselves whether or not they became persons of prayer; that by starting on the first steps of the ladder, and by persevering thereon, God's goodness would bring them to the state of which we are speaking, whereby their souls would be abundantly satisfied. God has invited many to this banquet, but they have excused themselves from coming for human reasons. They who are rich in faith, and who follow where God's voice calls them, must fill their places."[1]

There exist other signs more sure even than those which we have just had under consideration, and which will reveal to a confessor that a soul is ripe for the prayer of simple advertence. The first is a distaste for the manner of prayer which it has hitherto been practising, combined with the fact that it has reaped little profit from it. Thus when a person of good will and who delights much in prayer is unable, in spite of all efforts, either to meditate or to practise affective prayer; when such impossibility arises,

[1] *Instr. on Prayer*, part iii., inst. 5.

neither as a result of any mere passing trial or momentary aridity, but is of the nature of a permanent condition, and one which lasts for some considerable time, there is every reason to suppose that the moment has arrived for that person to pass on to the prayer of simple advertence. Wilfully to remain in the lower degree of prayer would be going contrary to the express will of God ; at the least it would be a waste of time.

Another sign not less sure is pointed out by Courbon under the name of disposition to unity : " That is to say that one single thought and one single affection keep us occupied for a considerable time. We have then no longer any tendency to the multitude of thoughts which was formerly the case, nor do we make any more the numberless acts which we used to do ; but the soul begins to enter into a kind of silence ; everything is quieter within her and less clamorous. All vehement and redoubled affective efforts are things of the past, all desires and movements of purely sensible nature have burnt low, and all that remains is of the nature of sweetness and peace. This is a sign that God is leading the soul little by little towards the prayer of which we are speaking, and is gently preparing it for its holy exercise."[1]

[1] *Instr. on Prayer*, part iii., inst. 5.

6. In conclusion let us say a few words as to the duration of this prayer. If, on this point, we consulted reason only, we should not accept without hesitation the solution with which we meet in spiritual writers. It is very difficult, in fact, for reason to admit that a soul can remain for an entire day engaged in one single thought, and occupied in the same act of love. But our judgment in this case must be corrected, or rather completed, by what faith has shown to us. If we remember that in this prayer grace intervenes at every instant, and that it operates in the soul under the form of a quite special attraction, all difficulties will vanish. We understand, then, that when persevering in the simple look a soul has no need to strain any of her faculties, but is rather gratifying their aspirations.

Besides, in such questions as these we should give the last word to experience. If it is proved that certain souls not yet in the enjoyment of the Mystical Life remained, nevertheless, an entire day in that unity of thought and affection, reason must be overruled by this fact. Now it appears that such is the case, and Courbon recalls the experience of the fact in order to confirm the possibility of such a prolonged continuance. "It is possible," he says, "to remain for one or

more days in the prayer of loving attention to God present; and it is possible that you yourself may be convinced of the fact by experience. It is very true that this attentive look is sometimes unperceived—that is to say, that it is realized more at certain times than at others. You must also bear in mind that I said that it was possible for one or more days; for to desire for it a period both continual and uninterrupted would be to exclude the making of requests, acts of hope, thanksgiving, and other religious actions enjoined upon us during the course of our life, and which we have to perform in a distinct manner at suitable times."[1]

In spite of Courbon's authority, we are still of opinion that it is not under the form of a single and uninterrupted gaze that this state of prayer must be understood; but rather under the form of a succession of simple looks admitting of periods of repose, also of interruptions.

7. We have already said that the prayer of simple advertence lost its character of joyousness and consolation in souls who are destined by God for the Mystical Life, in order to assume the sorrowful form which caused St. John of the Cross to call it the *Night of the senses*. We have

[1] *Instr. on Prayer*, part iii., inst. 7.

added that this last manner of prayer lay at the furthest limits of ordinary prayer, and that it already had in it something of the mystical character. Let us try to determine that character in a more detailed manner.

When describing the *Night of the senses*, spiritual writers too often think that they have done all that is necessary in the cause of truth when they have quoted a few detached passages from St. John himself, without taking the trouble to comment on them, without trying to throw any light on the ideas of that great mystic. Yet it is by no means easy to understand those ideas with any degree of certainty the first time the passage is read. How many are there, we wonder, who think that they understand St. John of the Cross, and yet have overlooked this central idea, the master thought which inspires his work? They would have been spared such a mishap if, before entering on their task, they had come across some guide who would have put them in possession of the clue to his meaning. This guide exists; it is of his services that I am about to avail myself, and all will be able, as I have done, to find it in Père Poulain's precious little book,[1] from which I intend so largely to quote. No one has thrown

[1] *La Mystique de Saint-Jean de la Croix.*

more light on the doctrine of St. John of the Cross touching the subject now under consideration than this religious.

Following his example we must recognize four distinct points in the *Night of the senses*—four component elements. Firstly, the soul experiences an habitual aridity. It is powerless to meditate, or to hold any discourse with God; at least, it can only perform such acts in a transitory way and disconnectedly. "Where the Lord leads the soul into the obscure night He refuses it all satisfaction, and does not permit it to cling to anything, in order to detach and purify it interiorly. This is an almost evident sign that the distaste and dryness do not arise from any faults or imperfections which it may recently have committed.

"The soul finds it impossible to make any use of imagination, to rouse itself to interior discourse, or to meditate as it used to do. The Lord no longer makes Himself known to the soul by way of the senses, as was formerly His custom by the aid of its reasoning powers whereby it was able to adjust and parcel out its ideas. The Divine communications are now confined to what is purely of the spirit's path, whence all acts of discursiveness are banished, and give place to the simple one of contem-

plation, which no co-operation of the senses, either exterior or interior, can reach.[1]

"The second element of this state," says Père Poulain, "is a remembrance of God, simple, indistinct, and of a general nature, returning independently of the will and with singular persistency. It is exactly as if one heard God's name mentioned casually in conversation. The mind does not set to work to think in order to develop the idea suggested, nor does it dwell upon any of God's attributes, His favours, or His claims, otherwise the soul would not be in a condition of aridity."[2]

Thirdly, this habitual thought of God is accompanied by a most painful anxiety. "The soul imagines that it is no longer serving God, even that it is losing ground, because it no more experiences any taste for holy things. And by this we see that there is a great difference between that aridity and tepidity, the characteristic of this latter being to make the soul sluggish, and to drive from the mind all solicitude for the things of God. In the Night of the senses, the sensitive powers are, it is true, cast down, and little capable of helping the soul

[1] St. John of the Cross, *The Obscure Night,* book i., chap. ix.

[2] *La Mystique de Saint-Jean de la Croix,* ch. ii., pp. 9, 10.

at prayer, having lost the support of any consolation which the senses might bring ; the mind, nevertheless, is active and full of vigour. When, on the contrary, aridity only arises from our own temperament, repugnance and distaste only extend to the things of this world, and there is none of that ardent desire to love God which is a characteristic feature of the aridities of the purgative way."[1]

Fourthly, the facts which we have so far described are, to speak the truth, only the signs characterizing the Night of the senses : such is, anyhow, the office assigned to them by St. John of the Cross. We have not yet penetrated into the inmost nature of that purifying phenomenon. We have still to analyze the element which constitutes its peculiar and specific character. I find this element expressed in the following lines of St. John of the Cross : " At the outset, the mind may be entirely unconscious that anything is going on ; nevertheless, in the interior and substantial nourishment which it is receiving, it is drawing up a certain energy and power to act. That nourishment is *a beginning of obscure contemplation.* This is, in its nature, dry, usually hidden from the senses, and unperceived even by the person himself."[2]

[1] *The Obscure Night,* book i., ch. ix. [2] *Ibid.*

What is the meaning of this *beginning of obscure contemplation* if not that the Night of the senses is mystical prayer in outline, a commencement of the prayer of quiet? What a consolation for those who are passing through this ordeal to know that, perhaps unknown to them, but nevertheless in a very real manner, the Mystical Life has made its entry into their souls! How comforting for them the prospect of some day possessing the full realization of that life which at the moment they only possess in its latent condition! For the Night of the senses is only a period of transition; it is only the preparatory trial which will one day lead to the ecstatic joys of the mystical union. Rightly, and for that reason, has Père Poulain given to it the name of *sub-mystical union*, a name which very truly describes its functions. "We now see," says the same writer, "why the Night of the senses leads to mystical union, why it prepares for it and causes it to germinate in its midst. It is merely the transition from the latent to the visible state, from the germ to the florescence. In the same way when chemists wish to obtain certain crystals, they prepare for their birth in a vessel where nothing is seen but a transparent liquid. But the salts are there dissolved and hidden within the mass. All that

is necessary is for the atoms to collect, and behold a glittering block appears which seems to have come from elsewhere. In reality it has but manifested its pre-existing presence."[1]

8. The description of the Night o the senses which we have borrowed from Père Poulain shows the necessity of a director to guide the soul in these dark places. Very often, in fact, it will persist in the old way of meditation, with the result that, running as it were up against a dead wall, it may be tempted to abandon this prayer, and to regard the moments spent therein as waste of time. The director's part will consist in reassuring that soul, in encouraging it, and in helping it to see that God is giving it a new form of prayer, and that its effort to withdraw itself from the Divine action can only hinder its progress and greatly retard the work of God within it.

In order to illustrate this latter truth St. John of the Cross makes use of an ingenious simile. He compares God's work in a soul to that of a painter who is painting a portrait. If the sitter remains still, the artist will catch the expression of the features without difficulty and the work will quickly be carried out. But if that person moves or fidgets ever so little, the

[1] *La Mystique de Saint-Jean de la Croix*, ch. iv.

painter is obliged to suspend his work and to wait till his model is pleased to sit still before taking up his brush again. In like manner, says St. John of the Cross, the least act, the least restless look which the soul permits itself to make from the midst of its repose, would infallibly cause trouble, would be a hindrance to God's action, and would hinder His secret communications. Let such a soul thoroughly realize that it is at the threshold of the Mystical Life ; let it truly understand that the full realization of this life will be given to it the moment God sees fit. Meanwhile the soul will gain by refusing all restless eagerness which, far from hastening God's hour, will only delay it.

9. It will now perhaps be expedient to make a rapid synthesis of the various stages through which the soul ordinarily passes in order to reach the Mystical Life. Thus grouped, things will stand out, it seems to me, in bolder relief, and it will be easier to understand the manner in which the various states of prayer are, as it were, built up one on the other, and how they are linked together.

At the outset of the spiritual life we find ordinary meditation. It is the intelligence which here does most of the work : the soul reasons, contemplates, and, to use a seventeenth-century

expression, uses reflections—all these acts mean the building of a real piece of work, but a piece of work upon which we must be careful not to look slightingly, for it is necessary in order that a soul may thereby gain strong convictions, and to it we owe the solid ground whence true and noble affections will presently issue.

In proportion as a soul gains convictions, reasonings become less necessary, and the employment of the affections at the same time increases and acquires more importance. The soul will soon be able by a simple glance to bring warmth to its convictions, and the affections will cover nearly the whole time formerly given to reasoning. That manner of prayer must be distinguished from ordinary meditation ; it well deserves to be classed apart from and above meditation, under the name of affective prayer.

Then, under the action of grace, a work of simplification takes place within the soul. Its affections tend more and more to unity ; they assume little by little the form of a single glance, a loving attention to God present. The object of these affections becomes simplified at the same time : that object is God, contemplated no longer under one of His aspects to-day and under another to-morrow, but God apprehended under a form which permits of no variation. The soul

has by this time reached the prayer of simple attention.

Must it continue long in this prayer before God brings it to the Mystical Life? If God applies the ordinary law, its time of waiting will not be long: the prayer of simple advertence is the immediate preparation for the mystical state.

Sometimes this prayer is sweet and pleasant; at others, on the contrary, it assumes a sorrowful character owing to the aridities which we have described under the name of *Night of the senses.* This ordeal is, according to an expression of St. John of the Cross cited above, already a "commencement of contemplation, hidden, indeed, from the senses, and unperceived by the person himself."

But one day, while engaged in prayer, the soul suddenly realizes an awakening of the spiritual faculties; it becomes conscious of God's inward presence after quite a new manner. It is but a flash which lasts for a moment; but it is sufficient to prove to the soul that a great gulf exists between this manner of experiencing God, of being united to God, and all the ordinary forms of recollection. It is sufficient to assure it of the certainty of having been momentarily transported into a new world.

On the morrow, or after a few days' interval, this first favour will be followed by a second of which the duration will be, perhaps, a little more considerable. God will thus enable it, little by little, to gain familiarity with His presence, and a time will come when it will experience God's presence directly it begins to pray. It can then truly be said that mystical prayer has become habitual.

The soul will then have reached the goal so long desired; it will have attained to that mystical contemplation which is the fruitful source of all good and of all holiness; to that contemplation which has called forth such splendid eulogies from the masters of the spiritual life, and of which Père Lallemand said: "Contemplation is the true wisdom: it moves souls to heroic acts of charity, of zeal, of penitence, and of other virtues."

"It is of sovereign importance," says St. Teresa, "for the soul raised to this prayer to understand both its great dignity and the inestimable value of such a grace; also its obligation not to belong any more to this world, since God, in His goodness, appears, henceforth, to intend Heaven to be its home. This prayer is a testimony of God's favour, and a sign that He makes choice of that soul for great things,

if it is able to respond to His high purposes for her. It is a splendid gift, and its excellence surpasses anything I can say of it . . . . I cannot too urgently exhort those whom God has chosen to be the help of so many others, not to allow so precious a talent to lie idle, more especially in our days when it behoves the friends of Our Lord to be strong to succour the feeble. Such as realize in themselves a like gift may justly consider themselves His friends: nothing then remains but to offer themselves up as a whole burnt-offering for His sake, with the devotion which such a noble friendship demands even in this world."[1]

May souls of good will find, in these pages which we have written, encouragement to strive along this upward path towards the high places of the spiritual life: and may the number of such souls be day by day increased to the glory of God and the greater good of the Church.

[1] *Life of St. Teresa*, ch. xv.

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